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Great leadership is required to replace schools chief Bice

Mark W.C. Martin

Throughout the day on April 14, 1912, the crew received multiple iceberg warnings. It wasn't until lookout Frederick Fleet cried "Iceberg DEAD AHEAD!" at 11:38 p.m., however, that anyone took them to heart. Despite quartermaster Robert Hichens testifying that he turned the wheel hard right, it was too late. The massive ship responded at a snail's pace and was on fire by 11:40 p.m. The Titanic was not made to maneuver.

As Alabamians were fixed upon the Super Tuesday results, one of our state's most important events went largely unnoticed. After nearly 40 years of dedicated service to Alabama's children, families, educators and communities, state schools Superintendent Tommy Bice quietly announced his March 31 retirement. Bice, who led the Alabama State Department of Education during the past five years, was considered a visionary leader and, in many ways, propelled the state into the 21st century.

Under Bice's leadership, the state raised learning standards, prioritized teacher preparation, and created pathways for school innovation and autonomy. As a result, graduation rates rose 17 points to 89 percent, students and teachers were better supported, and promising practices emerged.

However, a quick survey of the national landscape shows our students still lagging well behind in most achievement areas. As the State Board of Education looks ahead to consider Bice's successor, here are some key lessons that I learned during my fellowship at the board this past summer.

First, after speaking at an NAACP forum in Mobile, it became clear that Alabamians are fed up with excuses as to why we cannot have great schools for all children regardless of race, class, or ZIP code. Alabama needs a state education leader who is an "equity warrior," willing to fight for excellence and opportunity for all kids. There are schools across the country that have closed the racial and socio-economic achievement gaps with sound, replicable practices, but it requires that we implement and educate differently.

After meeting with business leaders from Mercedes-Benz to Huntsville's tech sector along with numerous community college presidents, it became apparent that these institutions can and must play a larger role in both training the future workforce and supporting the dreams of students statewide. A high school diploma is wholly insufficient in 2016 and beyond. Thus, we need a leader who can build partnerships across sectors to engage community groups and post-secondary institutions alongside industry in furthering our kids' future attainment.

After being inspired by students overcoming significant challenges in rural Lowndes County schools, it's clear that our most impoverished communities deserve a more equitable distribution of resources. Our new state leader must know how to empower a variety of communities and meet their needs, understanding that fair is not always equal. This will require expertise around funding formulas and fiscal policy and most importantly, a collaborative relationship with the state legislature.

The state's education department often appeared as responsive as the Titanic, and although Bice affected significant change, much work lies ahead.

As we search for a new state education leader, it's time to sound the iceberg warning. Many positive policies are sunk the minute they arrive in Alabama because the willingness and ability to efficiently enact reform is lacking. The alarming academic performance of our students urges that we fast track the implementation of policies that will both support teachers AND advance student outcomes, while balancing autonomy with accountability.

We need a leader who can educate "across the aisle" and navigate the sluggish, state education ship toward continuous improvement and organizational learning. Though no individual can do it all, together, we must all play a role in opening our minds to imagine and create a system of possibility, that supports teachers, educates all children, and rejects mediocrity once and for all.

Martin, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership, worked at the state Department of Education through the Gordon M. Ambach Fellowship, provided by Harvard University and The Council of Chief State School Officers. He is a native of Huntsville and was previously an elementary school teacher and principal in Atlanta and New Orleans.
City officials praise Bice

By: Drew Taylor

Tuscaloosa City Schools Superintendent Paul McKendrick remembers one time when he was at a banquet with state Superintendent Tommy Bice.

The event was at a recent Teacher of the Year banquet, where nearly 20 superintendents from across the state were in attendance with their teacher candidates. As Bice began leading the program, McKendrick watched as Bice asked each superintendent to stand up, where he introduced them and where they were from without using notes.

"There are a lot of us who know the job, but you don't get a lot of people who were that personable," McKendrick said of Bice, who will leave the state Department of Education at the end of the month.

Last week, Bice announced that he would retire from his duties as state superintendent to join the Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation as its education director. Formerly a deputy superintendent who directed department's instructional services division, Bice was selected as state superintendent in November 2011.

"While I may be retiring from formal public education, my work on behalf of students is far from over," Bice said in a written statement.

McKendrick said what made Bice special to work with because of the way he inspired many superintendents and educators to do more for their students.

"I think the thing we all liked about him so much was that he advocated for us to be innovative and be creative," he said. "He wanted us to not only think outside of the box, but to get out of the box."

Walter Davie, superintendent of Tuscaloosa County Schools, said Bice focused on doing what was best for students. Davie said Bice let local school systems have more autonomy and opened up the dialogue between his office and superintendents.

"In years past, you might get a quick 'No' or 'Probably not', but that shifted quickly toward 'Yes' or 'Let's see if we can work that out,'" Davie said. "I think a lot of that had to do with Dr. Bice's leadership."

McKendrick and Davie agreed that one of Bice's biggest accomplishments was Plan 2020, which advocated for statewide school reform through better assessment and curriculum. Some critics have said that the plan negatively affects local schools. But Bice has maintained that the state's graduation rates are up because of the changes, going from 72 percent in 2012 to 89 percent this past year.
graduation rates are up because of the changes, going from 72 percent in 2012 to 89 percent this past year.

"I'm hoping the state will continue with what he started because there has been so much gain," McKendrick said.

Davie said Bice strongly advocated for school assessment to be more in line with ACT testing, which he said colleges tended to look at more. In addition, Davie said Bice made assessment more comprehensive and not about trying to study for a single high-stakes test during the school year.

"Assessment is about trying to figure out what kids are doing well in or where they need help and making time to make adjustments to help them learn whatever standards they need to learn," Davie said.

McKendrick said he was happy for Bice in his new job, but that his absence would be felt in all Alabama schools.

"When I got the email stating that he was leaving, I sent an email to him saying 'What a loss for us,'" he said.

Davie said the department would likely keep moving in the direction Bice first set, no matter who was chosen to replace him.

"I think the hope is there won't be an immediate shift because a number of people believe that we are on the right path that we need to be on in order to progress," he said.

The State Board of Education will hold a meeting Thursday, where potential candidates to serve as interim superintendent could be discussed.
RSA promoting Alabama Black Belt

Dennis Pillion dpillion@al.com

Thomas Harris believes with all his heart that the hunting and fishing opportunities to be found in Alabama’s Black Belt region rank right up there among the best in the country.

Now, thanks to a unique partnership with Alabama’s state pension program and a couple of famous friends, he’s getting a chance to spread that message to millions of TV viewers and newspaper readers across the country.

Harris’ organization, Alabama Black Belt Adventures, has produced a series of print and radio advertisements touting a variety of reasons to visit the Black Belt, from hunting and fishing to historical sites, canoeing, kayaking and hiking.

“Since many people, even here in Alabama, do not know the fun things that there are to do in the Black Belt,” Harris said. “We’re making Alabamians aware of what we’ve got, and I think attracting people to spend time here instead of going to other states.

“We know we’re bringing in dollars from outside Alabama, but we’re also keeping Alabama dollars here. We’ve got 11 million acres for outdoor activities in the Black Belt and that’s very unique.”

The RSA, which owns Rhythm Media and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc., is helping out by donating the air time and print space to bring those ads to its larger audiences. Raycom owns 93 television stations in 18 states, and CNHI publishes more than 100 community newspapers in 23 states.

Some of those ads feature well-known outdoorsmen like Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) founder Ray Scott and Backmasters founder Jackie Bushman. Harris hopes that the Black Belt will stick in the minds of both Alabama locals and out-of-state hunters looking for a new experience.

“Hunters like to try different locations, different lodges, different types of hunting,” Harris said. “It’s the same thing with the Alabama Black Belt. We’re a different venue for a lot of those people who enjoy hunting in Arkansas or Georgia.”

“What we’re doing is getting our name out there to be on the same level with the other destinations.”

The Black Belt region is considered to be the swath of south-central Alabama from the Mississippi border south of Tuscaloosa, sweeping in an arc under Montgomery to the Georgia state line. Harris’ group considers 13 counties to be a part of the Black Belt, including Tuscaloosa, Clarke, Conecuh, and Monroe counties.

It is one of the poorest regions in the state, with few major cities or industries. That’s why tourism is seen as such an important driver of economic activity for the region.

“I’ve probably spent 30 or 40 years thinking about what you could do to help the Black Belt,” said RSA CEO David Bronner. “It’s hard to come up with anything because it’s such a poor area.”

Bronner said that RSA gets roughly $60 million per year in free ad space as part of its operating agreements with the stations and newspapers, and through those deals can reach a large audience, even if it’s not always the prime slots. Bronner and RSA used the networks the same way to promote the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, which RSA also owns.

“That’s how we really were able to push the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail to a level that probably we would have never reached without those the newspaper group and the television stations,” Bronner said.

The arrangement allows Bronner to donate the unused air time to the Black Belt initiative without taking dollars away from Raycom, CNHI or the pension fund.

“Raycom broadcasts to roughly 14 percent of America’s population,” Bronner said. “CNHI is much smaller, but it has newspapers that go from Massachusetts down through Texas.”

There is some indication that the tourism strategy is working. Web site traffic to AlabamaBlackBeltAdventures.org has doubled in recent months, and the hunting lodges and other businesses — listed on the site — have reported some upticks in interest since the campaign began.

“I think it’s turning around a little bit,” Bronner said. “I think we’re seeing some positives from a very difficult situation.”
"We want businesses to expand and create more jobs – not cut entry-level jobs because a patchwork of local minimum wages causes operating costs to rise. Our actions today will create predictability and consistency for Alabama’s economy, which benefits everyone."

ALABAMA SEN. JABO WAGGONER, after the Senate passed a bill that prevents Alabama cities from establishing their own minimum wages. The bill blocks Birmingham’s efforts to set a $10.10 minimum wage.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

UA names new business college dean

Western Michigan administrator to begin in July

Staff report

A Western Michigan University administrator has been named the new dean of the Culverhouse College of Commerce at the University of Alabama.

released by the university.

The college has been led by interim dean Brian Gray. Palan replaces Mike Hardin, who left UA to become provost at Samford University in Homewood in June 2015.

“We are pleased to welcome Dr. Palan to our University of Alabama family,” said Interim Provost Kevin Whitaker. “Her experience will prove invaluable

The hiring of Kay M. Palan, dean of Haworth College of Business at Western Michigan University, was announced by UA on Wednesday. Palan is scheduled to assume the UA post in July.

“The college’s positive trajectory, combined with its potential to be one of the very best business schools, makes this an exciting time to join the college and university,” Palan said in a statement for our business school as we move forward with the University’s strategic plan and vision.”

Palan has been the business dean at Western Michigan since 2010 and was also on the faculty at Iowa State University. She previously worked as executive director at Health Enterprises in Fargo, North Dakota, and director of Traill County Nursing Services in Hillsboro, North Dakota.
UA RESEARCH

Happy workers do better

Productivity tied to job satisfaction

More Online

Are you happy at work?
Vote in our Web poll at www.tuscaloosanews.com.

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Your co-workers and the meaning you assign to your work has more to do with on-the-job happiness than the size of your paycheck or your job title, a researcher at the University of Alabama has found.

Jonathon Halbesleben is a professor and researcher in UA's Culverhouse College of Commerce. He also serves as the college's associate dean for research and its senior associate dean. He has spent most of his career researching how to find the sweet spot between maximum happiness and peak productivity in the workplace.

"I'm really interested in how people can thrive at work, how they can be successful and happy at the same time," Halbesleben said. "The idea is to get people in that good place. They're spending a third of their life at work. Between that and sleeping, that's how we spend most of our time. We're just trying to figure out ways to make it the best it can possibly be."

The greatest common factor for both satisfaction and stress at a job is the meaning employees attach to the work they're doing.

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HAPPINESS

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"So much of it ends up being how meaningful it is to you," he said. "A lot of people do all kinds of crazy jobs for very little pay or no pay at all, but they get a lot of meaning out of it and put aside some of their other needs or desires in terms of pay, knowing that they're doing something bigger."

On the other side of the same coin, a bigger paycheck may do little to assuage someone who finds their work dull or meaningless.

Halbesleben said most of his research is survey-based, and data is gathered from employees and the people who interact with them, including co-workers and family members. His advice to people who find themselves constantly unhappy at work or considering quitting their jobs is to take a step back and evaluate. He said if someone can find a "glimmer of hope" in something that still makes them happy, they and their supervisors can work toward including more of what they find meaningful into day-to-day work.

"To the extent you can, you've got to allow people to craft the job that they're really going to be the best at," Halbesleben said. "There's a lot of power in that. It keeps people happy, and they can perform at very high levels as well."

And if you can't find that glimmer of hope or change the job to include more of what makes you happy, it may be time to find something better, Halbesleben said.

"If you take that step back and say 'This job is not going to make me happy,' start looking at what other options are," he said.

"It's not uncommon that people end up changing careers. A lot of times, what happens is what they thought made them happy just isn't doing it anymore, and so they just have to reevaluate where they are."
An Alabama law school outdoes Vanderbilt, Yale and Columbia in key statistic

By: Leada Gore

The University of Alabama School of Law has turned out governors, Congressmen and a host of other movers and shakers. And, at least when it comes to one key ranking, the UA School of Law tops some of the nation's largest law schools, including several at Ivy League institutions.

Start Class ranked law schools by the percentage of students who pass the bar exam on their first attempt.

UA's School of Law ranked number six on the list of schools with the highest percentage of those who pass the bar exam on their first try. Slightly more than 96 percent of UA law school students pass the test with just one attempt, a figure that's 10 percent better than other places in the state.

Alabama's bar exam passage rate is higher than the University of Michigan (93.6 percent); Boston College (94.4 percent); Cornell Law School (94.4 percent); University of Georgia School of Law (94.8 percent); Duke University School of Law (95.4 percent); Vanderbilt School of Law (95.6 percent); Yale Law School (96.2 percent); and Columbia University Law School (96.3 percent).
Saban urges legislative action

Law would train educators in awareness, prevention

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Thanks in no small part to Alabama head football coach Nick Saban, a bill was introduced in the state Senate committee Tuesday that, if passed, will make suicide awareness and prevention training mandatory for all certified public school personnel.

The bill, championed in the Legislature by Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Cotterdale, is known as the Jason Flatt Act, named for a 16-year-old who took his life in 1997. After losing his son, Clark Flatt created the

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Jason Foundation to raise awareness of the “silent epidemic” of youth suicide.

Since then, Flatt has worked nationwide with legislators, entertainers, coaches and more trying to prevent youth suicide.

Flatt said at a news conference Tuesday morning that he began his partnership with Saban, who then was head football coach at LSU, in 2001. Saban became the Jason Foundation's third-ever coach ambassador.

“He’s been fantastic to work with throughout the years,” Flatt said. “He’s has done everything he could do for us.”

Flatt said he meets with Saban twice a year to update the coach on the foundation’s efforts and needs, and last May, he was explaining the Jason Flatt Act, which had just been adopted in Texas.

“He asked me why we had not brought the Jason Flatt Act to Alabama,” Flatt said. “I did not have a good answer except we did not have a crusader, we needed those contacts, and he told me as we were breaking up our meeting that he was going to work on that.”

Flatt said within hours, Allen and Gov. Robert Bentley had called him to find out more about the legislation and see what they could do to bring it to Alabama.

Saban said Tuesday that after raising two children and dedicating 42 years of his life to coaching young
people, youth suicide prevention matters deeply to him.

"We've been very, very fortunate through the years to have very few players suffer issues and problems while we were coaching them, but we have had some," Saban said. "It's one of the most devastating things you have to go through, even as a coach."

Saban said his support of the Jason Foundation is purely driven by a desire to help Alabama's youth.

The Jason Foundation provides each state that passes the act access to an online library of resources, allowing educators to complete the mandatory training at no cost to the state or local school board.

The Jason Flatt Act has been passed in 17 states, including Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia. Allen said with the Senate leadership and advocacy groups strongly supporting the bill, he expects it will pass in the Alabama Legislature with little resistance.

"This is a nonpartisan issue," Allen said. "Everyone understands how precious life is."
Eggs-ellent event

Presley Morgan, 10 months, sits in the grass surrounded by plastic eggs. ERIN NELSON/STAFF PHOTOS

UA group distributes more than 26,000 candy-filled eggs to children

By Kyarra Harris
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

A couple of hundred parents and children enjoyed perfect egg-hunting weather Sunday afternoon during the annual Easter egg hunt, held at the University of Alabama President’s Mansion.

Residents of the Tuscaloosa community were invited to bring their children and hunt for more than 26,000 eggs on a sunny day with comfortable temperatures in the low 70s.

The event was hosted by the Alabama Panhellenic Association. The organization holds

David Doyle, 11, and his sister Claire, 9, sit on the sidewalk and open plastic eggs to see what candy is inside each of them.

EGGS
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the egg hunt as a means to get the local community involved with UA.
"We really want local families of Tuscaloosa to come and get to spend some time at the President's Mansion and celebrate Easter," said Emma Farrow, the association's director of community development and outreach.

Children were able to get their faces painted, take pictures with the Easter Bunny and enjoy refreshments provided by Bama Dining.

Chris Reese, self-employed owner of Tutor Doctor, said the timing of the Sunday event was perfect, since many egg hunts will be taking place next weekend.

"We're going on vacation next week," Reese said. "This is a lot of fun, for my daughter to be able to collect eggs and meet the Easter egg bunny."

The weather allowed just right for everyone to run around the mansion's lawn in search of eggs filled with an assortment of candies.

Heather White, an English professor at UA, said this was her first year to attend the egg hunt, though they attend many other UA events.

"This is wonderful," White said. "My kids heard the words egg hunt this morning and have been awaiting confirmation."

White's 8-year-old son, Zander, filled his basket with eggs.

"Picking up the eggs and shaking them to see what's inside was fun," Zander White said. "I'm coming back next year."

Marissa Tuck, the Alabama Panhellenic Association's director of public relations, said a parent told her they've attended several years but this year's was the best because there were plenty of eggs.

"This hunt was definitely more eggs than children," Tuck said. "Everyone was able to fill their bag."

Lytrice Murray has brought her two children to the egg hunt the past three years and she said she appreciated the volume of eggs.

"At some egg hunts it's harder for younger kids, but my youngest had no problems," Murray said. "They both had a blast."

Her daughter Indya Murray, 10, said she enjoyed all of her findings.

"I had fun today, and I got the gold egg," Indya Murray said.

Farrow said another big event the outreach program holds is Halloween trick-or-treating on Sorority Row.

"We invite the kids to come to each sorority house and give out candy. They dress up in costumes and it's a lot of fun," Farrow said.
Retired Birmingham businessman Edgar Welden has worked behind the scenes for decades to promote athletics in his home state.

Welden founded the Birmingham Athletic Partnership, a non-profit that supports the city's middle and high school athletic programs. He has served as the chairman/president of the Bryant-Jordan Scholarship Program since 2008, and co-chaired the committee that landed the 2021 World Games for Birmingham.

For his efforts, Welden is the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame's 2016 Distinguished American Sportsman. Welden, who also serves as the chair of the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame Board of Directors, will be honored with the Class of 2016 inductees on May 21 at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel. Other past Distinguished American Sportsmen include former SEC Commissioners Roy Kramer and Mike Slive, former President George H.W. Bush and comedian Bob Hope.

Welden grew up in Wetumpka, playing football, basketball and baseball, before earning a business degree at Alabama. After graduation in 1968, his business ventures in Birmingham centered on real estate development, apartments, property management and mortgages.

As Chairman/President of the Bryant-Jordan Student-Athlete Scholarship Program, he helps direct a program that annually awards more than 100 college scholarships to high school senior student-athletes.

In 2002, Welden founded the Birmingham Athletic Partnership, a non-profit that helps fund equipment, education and facilities for sports and other extracurricular activities such as band and choir.

"Sports, I think, is a motivator to kids to stay in school and get good grades, and team sports teach so many life lessons," he said. "I think it's so important to play team sports."

An avid recreational tennis player, Welden traveled to and played tennis in all 57 Alabama counties in 2003, while promoting the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame. When a tennis court was not available, he played in the street and once played in the hallway of a county courthouse.

In 1997, he took a year off and travelled more than 120,000 miles and attended more than 250 sporting events in all 50 states — from the World Series to the Super Bowl to the X Games to the Iditarod.

Welden has received countless honors, including induction into the Alabama Academy of Honor in October 2014. In 2001, he earned the Alabama Humanities Award and won the University of Alabama's Distinguished Alumni Award in that same year. He was inducted into the AHSAA Hall of Fame in 2007.

Welden was honored as the National Governors' Association Distinguished Service to State Government Award in 1992 and was named Alabama's Citizen of the Year for 1997 by the Alabama Broadcasters Association.

The Alabama Sports Hall of Fame surprised him at a recent board meeting and told him he's the 2016 Distinguished American Sportsman.

"I told them they were out of order, but I was overruled," he joked. "I told them I accepted and told them how much I appreciated it and how honored I am."
TUSCALOOSA CITY HALL

City has $35M for construction

New street, train station possible

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

City officials confirmed this week that $35 million has been secured to fund the planning and construction of a series of infrastructure projects across Tuscaloosa.

The money, which came from the sale of the general obligation warrants, will be repaid at a rate of about $1.872 million per year, which is slightly less than the annual $1.9 million payment that city officials expected.

"It turned out better than either of us expected," said Mike Wright, the city finance director.

Of the money secured, the City Council already has approved the use of $30.1 million. That money will go to primarily road projects, including $5 million for a citywide paving contract of about 130 streets; $4 million each for improvements to Rice Mine Road and rebuilding portions of Jack Warner Parkway; $3.5 million to upgrade James I. Harrison Parkway; and $3 million for improvements to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

Last month, Mayor Walter Maddox proposed that $4 million go toward the construction of a new street and Amtrak train.

See next page
Train

The remaining $900,000 likely will be set aside as a contingency fund to cover any unforeseen expenses.

Should the council approve the mayor’s latest recommendations, the new street would take up $2.5 million and stretch between 23rd and 25th avenues just north of University Boulevard and south of the Alberta Parkway that’s now under construction.

The new street would be called Eighth Street East and could contain a traffic circle at the 24th Avenue intersection.

Another $1.5 million could go toward the construction of a new train station on the southernmost end of the former Leland Shopping Center site.

The new train station, expected to be about 3,000 square feet, would be the new home of Amtrak in Tuscaloosa and feature ample parking for riders.

The mayor has said

Proposed bond issue projects

$5 million: Citywide paving
$4.6 million: Brookhaven drainage project
$4 million: Rice Mine Road improvements
$3.5 million: James I. Harrison Parkway improvements
$3 million: Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard improvements
$2.5 million: Cypress Creek drainage project
$2.5 million: Eighth Street East development and construction*
$2 million: University of Alabama/downtown Tuscaloosa corridor improvements
$1.5 million: New Amtrak train station construction*
$1 million: City facility improvements
$500,000: Downtown parking

* Pending City Council approval

Amtrak’s Tuscaloosa station now has about 12,000 passengers annually, which is fewer than in Meridian, Mississippi, a city about half the size of Tuscaloosa, and the lack of a new station could mean the loss of Amtrak service in the city.

Both the train station and new street projects, which fall within the tornado recovery area, were meant to be funded with proceeds the city had hoped to obtain from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s National Disaster Resilience Competition.

The city had made it to the competition’s final round and officials were expecting to receive a portion of the almost $1 billion in funds that HUD is giving away.

But in January, HUD released its list of 13 winners and Tuscaloosa was not included.

As for repaying the general obligation warrants, the annual payment is expected to come from estimated new revenue generated from the reallocation of the combined Tuscaloosa County 2-cent sales tax — which is now shared among five local government entities and DCH Regional Medical Center — and a 1-cent temporary sales tax that is now dedicated primarily for school construction.

The new tax structure, approved by the Alabama Legislature last year, goes into effect July 1. It will make the 1-cent sales tax permanent while redistributing its proceeds.

From the 1-cent sales tax, the city expected to generate about $2.4 million in additional revenue in fiscal 2017, based on the latest projections.

City projections indicate this total should increase by at least 2.5 percent each year.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
UAB facing Title IX federal complaint

Student claims school mishandled sexual assault investigation

Kelsey Stein
kstein@al.com

A UAB student has filed a federal complaint alleging the school mishandled a sexual assault investigation.

The woman — who asked to remain anonymous — filed the complaint in the past week. She says school officials would not use the forensic sexual assault examination, or rape kit, in their investigation because no one is "trained at the university to interpret forensic data correctly," according to End Rape on Campus, a national survivor advocacy organization.

The assault happened in September 2014, and the victim knew the perpetrator, she told AL.com on Tuesday. Though it did not happen on campus, UAB’s Student Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy applies to any alleged violation that occurs off-campus "if it affects the campus or the access to education and the safety of a student."

She did not know until a year later that she could pursue protection under Title IX after watching a documentary called "The Hunting Ground" about sexual assault on U.S. college campuses.

Several people featured in the documentary later founded End Rape on Campus. She reached out to the organization, where people like co-founder Sofia Karasek helped her through the Title IX process.

UAB officials issued a statement saying they cannot address details of a specific investigation, but outlining how the school handles such cases.

"Federal student privacy laws prohibit us from publicly disclosing details of a sexual assault investigation," the statement reads. "We work with appropriate parties on and off campus to review and ensure an appropriate resolution to any incident, as well as continue initiatives to educate and empower our students, faculty and staff to promote a campus culture that prevents and responds appropriately to sexual assault."

After the woman filed a complaint with the school, she was told investigations followed a 60-day timeline. That initial investigation took closer to three months, and the alleged perpetrator was given additional time to respond to emails and through attorneys, she said.

"I didn’t know before I reported that I would go in swimming against the tide to begin with. ... The school put the responsibility on me..." anonymous UAB student

She received the findings of the initial investigation in January, informing her that he had not been found responsible. A no-contact order was issued to prohibit interaction between the two.

"The school put the responsibility on me... saying I had to come in through the back of buildings, use the stairs, park farther away, use the medical school library instead of the undergraduate library," she said. "If we find ourselves in the same place, I am to remove myself from the situation. It’s kind of ridiculous that they would put all that on me."

She is currently appealing her case on several grounds. Despite a 30-day timeline for appeals, she has not yet been informed of the outcome, she said.

Throughout the process, she said she has been treated as if she is lying about the assault, has been asked to turn over medical records, and has been met with defensiveness from school officials.

"That’s something that I really thought about before I sat down and filed (the complaint) — that the way UAB has treated me is atrocious, and the way that they’ve gone about this process you would think that they’ve never done it before," she said. "I’m a strong person. I’m somebody who can take it, but I’m not going to ... Not everybody is strong enough to say, ‘You can’t do that to me,’ or has the ability to say that."

She has since connected with people on campus and in the city who provide resources for survivors of sexual assault with the hopes of improving the process for others.

"I know I probably won’t get justice for my own case, but that’s what has kept me motivated," she said. "This is not just about me... I hope to get this conversation started. People don’t come forward because they get treated like I’ve been treated, and they don’t want to be blamed when they already are traumatized."

TITLE IX COMPLAINTS

Similar federal Title IX complaints have been filed this week claiming three other institutions also mishandled sexual assault cases, according to End Rape on Campus.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity.

The complaints were filed in the past week against American University in Washington, D.C.; Indiana University Bloomington; Monmouth University in New Jersey; and UAB.

End Rape on Campus says the details of each case are markedly similar. For example, no-contact orders between victims and perpetrators were not enforced, and several of the women have been subjected to ongoing retaliation.

Each investigation took "significantly longer" than the 60-day time frame recommended by the U.S. Department of Education, the organization says.

"Ultimately, all of the survivors’ perpetrators were either found not responsible or were given minimal sanctions, creating a hostile environment for the survivors and severely compromising their educational experiences," a news release states.

The Department of Education has several manners of following up on a Title IX complaint. It can investigate the case through the larger lens of the school’s policies and practices, or it can initiate an overall compliance review of the institution, Karasek said.

"If they think that there’s a larger issue, that this wasn’t just an issue in one case and that it could be something that’s happening repeatedly, they can initiate a larger review of other cases," Karasek said. "We’re not sure what the department will decide to do."
Top HIV/AIDS researcher recruited to UAB for leadership post

By: Alan Alexander

The University of Alabama at Birmingham has recruited a national expert and HIV/AIDS researcher as the director of its Division of Infectious Diseases.

Jeanne Marrazzo was hired to the position this month.

She joins UAB from her role as medical director of the University of Washington STD/HIV Prevention Training Center.

"As the director of the Division of Infectious Diseases at UAB, I look forward to fulfilling two of my lifelong passions: fostering interdisciplinary collaborative research and mentoring young and mid-career faculty," Marrazzo said. "UAB has been a leader in HIV and STD research for decades with a well-recognized reputation and body of work."

Marrazzo is the president of the Council of the American Board of Internal Medicine. She also serves as president of the International Society for STD Research

Marrazzo succeeds Dr. Edward Hook, who is stepping down to focus on his research efforts within sexually transmitted infections, according to a release from the school.
Researchers: CBD oil study shows promising results

Amy Yurkanin  ayurkanin@al.com

About half of the patients who enrolled in a study of CBD oil at UAB had reductions in seizure frequency, according to initial results that will be reported at the American Academy of Neurology meeting in April.

Seizures declined by an average of 32 percent to 45 percent for the patients who responded to CBD oil, according to UAB. Two patients out of the 31 initially enrolled became seizure-free after they began taking CBD oil, which is derived from marijuana.

The results came from the first six months of the study, and includes patients who have not responded to traditional seizure treatment. Seven of the participants dropped out due to the side effects or lack of effectiveness of the oil.

UAB launched the study in April 2015, a year after the governor signed Carly’s Law, which lifted a prohibition against using CBD oil for research. The law was named for Carly Chandler, a Birmingham-area youngster who suffers from a severe seizure disorder.

UAB has been using CBD oil provided by a pharmaceutical company under the requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The oil has traces of THC, which is the psychoactive component of marijuana.

Researchers also found CBD oil can interact with an anti-epileptic drug clobazam. Participants who used both drugs had higher blood levels of clobazam, which could cause sedation, researchers reported.

A study of electrical activity in the brain showed no change among those using CBD oil, according to UAB.

“The studies are ongoing, and we have a lot more to learn; but these preliminary findings are encouraging,” said Jerzy Szafarski, M.D., Ph.D., professor in the Department of Neurology.

“Among our goals was to determine the safety of CBD oil therapy, and it appears that, in many cases, patients tolerate the oil quite well. The evidence of seizure reduction gives us hope that, the more we learn about CBD oil, the better we will be able to tailor this therapy to provide relief for those with severe epilepsy.”
UAB PLANS MAJOR NEW HEALTH PROJECT IN GARDENDALE

The University of Alabama at Birmingham Health Services Foundation plans to purchase five acres in Gardendale develop for two new medical facilities.

UAB will construct one building for primary care and family care services and another as a freestanding emergency room.

The goal of the project is to improve access to care in a traditionally underserved portion of metro Birmingham.

The plans have to be approved by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees and the State Health Planning and Development Agency.

The projected cost of the development has yet to be disclosed.
New UAB Hospital facilities to be built in Gardendale

By: Melanie Posey

UAB is expanding its footprint and preparing to head to Gardendale. Monday, the city sold five acres of property to UAB for just over $1 million.

Gardendale Mayor Stan Hogeland says the land will be used for a two-phase project.

The first will be a medical office building that will sit in the city center on Mount Olive Road near the Buffalo Wild Wings.

A ground breaking on the 20,000 square foot building is scheduled for later this summer with a completion date of next spring.

Hogeland says the facility will include several doctors, specialists, imaging, MRI labs and more. He says UAB has already submitted its certificate of need to the state for the ER and once that is approved, they will start construction on that.

"A lot of the people now in our community and in the entire north Jefferson area that are having to go to Kirkland Clinic downtown, now they’ll be able to stay here in Gardendale. So with our community aging and having to go downtown, it’s a way to keep them home and limit their driving time," Hogeland says. "It is a great quality of life enhancement project for our area."

Hogeland hopes that approval will be by next spring as well. All together, the buildings will be about a $25 million project.

"Just the closeness of expert, immediate care and the amount of lives that’s going to save and it’s just going to pull people into our city from so many areas such as Blount and Walker and Cullman counties," Hogeland says.

He’s also excited about partnering with UAB.

"As a city, any time you we can put our city logo right beside the UAB logo, that says exactly what we want it to say," he said.

This project will sit on about five acres out of a total of 20 acres of vacant land the city owns in this area.

Hogeland says the hope is that these two projects will jump start more development in that area, including more restaurant and retail space.
UAB’s latest master plan blazes a new trail on Southside

How UAB’s new master plan could shape the future of the school and Birmingham

By: Alan Alexander and Brent Godwin

For a long period of time, the University of Alabama at Birmingham was the only entity buying large swaths of property on Birmingham’s Southside.

That made the growing school - and Birmingham’s largest employer – the ultimate market mover in a key part of the city.
But today, there are hundreds of millions of dollars worth of construction less than 10 blocks from UAB’s campus. Private developers are now scooping up properties with their sights on apartment complexes or mixed-use developments – with UAB’s allure acting as a key catalyst.

Times have changed, but UAB’s status in the local commercial real estate scene has not. Now, with sights on enrollment growth and big ambitions for the future, the school is eyeing some big steps to transform its campus and tap into the energy of a revived downtown Birmingham.

The school recently developed a new master plan that will transform not just the campus, but the entire Southside, creating new opportunities for developers, innovators and the region.

UAB’s plan, which the school is viewing as a shaping document to help guide its short- and long-term futures, includes several new buildings – from a new home for the Collat School of Business and a football operations facility to a major expansion of the College of Nursing.

But new facilities are only one part of the strategy, which aims to address everything from parking to greenspaces and beyond.

That means rethinking everything from parking to streetscapes and the border zones between UAB and nearby neighborhoods. And it includes a big strategic shift that could have long-term implications for property around the campus: UAB is turning its focus to density and building vertical, instead of solely on outward growth.

There was a time when many viewed UAB as a campus where students came for the day and returned home. But that is changing, and the new plan takes that into account.
“"The days of UAB being considered a commuter campus are long gone, as 70 percent of the freshmen class now lives on campus," President Ray Watts said.

Watts said the school has a strong focus on undergraduate recruitment with Alabama and the U.S., as well as a partnership to grow its international student base.

The school recently built a new residence hall, and James Fowler, UAB’s director of planning design and construction, said another one could be built in the future to complement the recently completed one.

UAB’s plan also addresses where the school’s campus fits into Birmingham.

See next page
“A lot of consideration of being a good neighbor, particularly where we bump into neighborhoods, and a lot of our planning considers in particular what is placed in those buffer areas between us and neighborhoods,” said Allen Bolton, UAB’s vice president of finance and administration.

School leaders say one key goal is helping position the campus within the greater framework of the revitalized downtown.

One big idea along those lines that could have major real estate implications is creating a stronger link between UAB and the growing Parkside district.

“President Watts has said he wants to create an enhanced connection up 15th Street from campus to Parkside,” Fowler said. “What we want to do is work with Jefferson County, who owns much of that property, and with private land owners and the city to develop something that is really of benefit to everybody. I think we can do something great there.”

Real estate brokers say creating a dedicated corridor for students could make it easier for developers to recruit retailers to the area by drawing on UAB’s large population of students, faculty and employees.

The plan also represents one key shift for UAB. Its campus will become more dense and more vertical.

“I would say we’re trying to densify in the core of our campus and improve walkability and pay attention to five-minute walk circles. We want to be careful about how we spread outward,” Fowler said.

UAB’s strategic shift is highlighted by plans for the College of Nursing, where five floors will be added to the existing facility. That will allow UAB to preserve greenspaces.

“It creates open green spaces for us as we go vertical,” Fowler said. “Where we do grow at the edges, it would be strategic and involve partnerships with the city and with communities. But we have the room to grow on our campus the way we need to.”

While UAB is shifting its focus to density, there are some logical areas of campus growth the school is targeting.

One of those is the former Alagasco property UAB purchased in 2013 for $14 million. The school is creating a new remote parking lot at the property. But it would like to do even more.

“We really want to do something to energize that area a little bit so that it doesn’t feel desolate if you’re parking over there,” Fowler said. “That’s the area that’s evolving, and the area where we’re growing the most of in terms of our boundaries.”

See next page
UAB’s strategic plan could also weigh heavily into efforts to create a true innovation district downtown to connect the school with Southern Research and Innovation Depot.

Watts said UAB is working more closely than ever with the Birmingham Business Alliance, local governments and industry partners to make it a reality.

He said one major component of the district, which experts have said could transform Birmingham’s economy for decades to come, is a technology village that will help Innovation Depot graduates take the next step.

Commercial real estate experts expect UAB’s growth to continue, and the school’s plan could have several implications for the market.

Southpace Properties Principal John Lauriello said there was a time when most property sellers near UAB would only consider selling the property for $40 to $50 per square foot. UAB was often the only potential buyer.

But with downtown’s growth, that has changed. Some properties have sold at up to $80 per square foot in the city center.

Lauriello said there isn’t a huge amount of property left near UAB from Interstate 65 to 20th Street or other key corridors. – a factor that could translate to rising property values in many coveted areas near campus.

Harbert Realty’s Dean Nix said efforts to connect UAB with areas like Parkside could pay dividends when it comes to recruiting new tenants. He said UAB is a key driver of downtown activity, to the point where the campus is attracting nonstudents to the area.

“They are continuing to enhance the entire Southside area,” Nix said. “I think it’s kind of brought the central business district to UAB and vice versa. They’ve started to co-mingle.”
FUTURE OF UAB'S CAMPUS

One of the key aspects of UAB's new master plan is a 'shaping map' that will help transform the urban campus in the future. We're sharing key components of the plan, some of which are long-term strategies, as well as quotes from UAB's James Fowler about the strategy.

NEW BUSINESS SCHOOL BUILDING

Plans are advancing for a new building to house the Collat School of Business and the Bill L. Harbert Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which will play a critical role in the connection between UAB and the Birmingham business community. The project has received Phase 2 approval from the board.

STREETSCAPES

The school's plan includes a fresh look at streetscapes and making the campus more appealing and pedestrian-friendly. That could also include consideration of landscaping in the middle of UAB's campus open spaces. In the long term, the school may look at developing a boulevard.

GOING GREEN

Creating and preserving green spaces like the Campus Green (below) is a theme throughout the new plan. For example, adding floors to the nursing school building rather than creating a new facility will allow UAB to preserve an adjacent park for the long-term.

SCHOOL OF NURSING EXPANSION

UAB plans to add five stories to the existing building, while ultimately preserving the neighboring park - one example of the school's shift toward a vertical, density-based focus. Here is a conceptual rendering.

INNOVATION CONNECTION

UAB says it is working more closely than ever to help create an innovation district that would leverage UAB, Southern Research and Innovation Depot, ultimately leading to more commercialization, spinoffs and startups.

"What we want to do is work with Jefferson County, who owns much of that property, and with private land owners and the city to develop something that is really of benefit to everybody. I think we can do something great there." - James Fowler
What UAB's new master plan means for commercial real estate in Bham

By: Brent Godwin

As revitalization in the city center of Birmingham continues, there is one specific area where a high percentage of future growth could be of the vertical variety – the University of Alabama at Birmingham campus.

In this week's Cover Story, we took an in-depth look at UAB's recently approved master plan. Two words came up often: density and vertical. And many commercial real estate pros we talked to are pretty happy with the school's new strategy. Before attractions like Railroad Park and Regions Field entered the fray, brokers say UAB was virtually the only entity buying up large tracts of property on the Southside.

With developers investing heavily in the city center, that's no longer the case. There are currently more than $650 million worth of projects in development within eight blocks of the campus.

"Until the last few years, most if not all potential sellers in the areas around UAB would only consider selling the property based on a land value of $40 to $50 per square foot," said John Lauriello, principal at Southpace Properties.

Now, private developers are buying property for up to $80 per square foot near the school's campus, Lauriello said.

If UAB's master plan involved a significant expansion of its footprint, that could create some challenges for the market – especially with the lack of available property near the campus.

That's one reason why brokers like Harbert Realty's Dean Nix are big fans of UAB's new plan, which focuses on increasing the density of development on campus with projects like the new Collat School of Business building, a new Arts & Sciences building and a football operations facility. Perhaps the best example of UAB's strategy shift are its plans for expanding the College of Nursing. Rather than building a new facility, the school is adding five floors to the existing building.

That will increase on-campus density while preserving a nearby greenspace – another focus of the new master plan.

"If they are going to build vertically, I think that’s wise because it keeps the campus kind of hemmed in," Nix said. UAB hasn't ruled out future property purchases and declined to discuss any potential or future deals, but school officials heavily stressed a focus on building on-campus density.

One area UAB officials said could see some growth in connection with the plan is near the property it acquired from Alagasco that sits across Interstate 20/59 from the primary campus.
"That's the area that's evolving, and the area where we're growing the most of in terms of our boundaries," said James Fowler, UAB's director of planning design and construction.

Fowler said the school would like to do something to energize that area – which unlike the school boundaries across the interstate, hasn't seen an abundance of private development.

Like it is in so many other aspects of the economy, there's potential for UAB to set the pace on that front.
Smith: Goal is stadium for UAB football by 2018

By: Alan Alexander

Hatton Smith, chair of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Athletics Committee, laid out an ambitious plan for new facilities designed to host the UAB football program at a Rotary Club of Birmingham meeting on Wednesday.

It's a grand vision that Smith said will transform Birmingham and create a new energy for the city. In addition to the $15 million football practice facility in the works on campus, that vision includes a long-discussed 45,000-seat stadium located just north of the Legacy Arena at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex. No official plan or construction cost has been unveiled by BJCC officials or the city of Birmingham, but Smith said funding for the stadium would likely be raised through a public-private partnership, possibly with the city's banking industry. UAB has previously said it would be a tenant in the stadium, but wouldn't shoulder the financial burden of building it.

The goal is to have UAB playing in the new stadium by August 2018, Smith said.

"The whole north side is going to explode. Our city is going to be what we make it. The vision for UAB football is no longer UAB football, it's all about Birmingham. Why should we cede to Atlanta or Nashville? We should take control of our community and build this. We have the greatest opportunity."

As we've previously reported, the BJCC consulted with an architectural firm in November to study the possibility of a new stadium near the BJCC. That process is ongoing.

As for the future of Legion Field, Smith said it could be demolished and the land repurposed for green space, inner-city housing and other economic development purposes.

Any finalized plans will need to be approved by the city of Birmingham, which owns the stadium, and the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees before any work can begin.
UAB fans get first glimpse of revived program at Blazers' open practice

By: David Ching

Fifteen months removed from its last football game, UAB opened its first spring practice since university officials decided to resuscitate the program last June.

Although the Blazers will not play again for 18 months -- 544 days to be exact, when Alabama A&M visits Legion Field next Sept. 2 -- coach Bill Clark and his staff are gradually piecing together their program once again. They gave the public its first glance at their revived program on Saturday by holding an open practice in place of a spring game.

“It’s like another box we need to check,” Clark said. “Like I told guys, it’s just a regular practice for us because we only have 67 guys. ... It’s physical, but we don’t take [ball carriers] to the ground. We just don’t have that kind of depth. I don’t do a lot of that anyway because you protect them as much as you can. But people can see how we practice and all that stuff and hopefully be excited by it.”

Judging by the estimated crowd of 2,500 fans who showed up, joined by the band, cheerleaders and dance team, optimism abounds among those wearing green and gold.

Some hung around to tailgate in the parking lot after the practice, flying “Free UAB” flags and watching on TV as the men’s basketball team notched its school-record 24th win of the season by beating Florida Atlantic.

Some fans instead watched the “Sons of UAB” flag football game, featuring former lettermen like NFL players Roddy White and Joe Webb.

All of them were glad to see another Blazers team wearing helmets and shoulder pads -- a sight that many of them never expected to see again once UAB president Ray Watts announced at the end of the 2014 season that the school would disband its football, bowling and rifle teams.

“It’s awesome to see that they’re just as excited as we are to play next season,” defensive lineman Shaq Jones said.

That seems to be a common sentiment among Blazers players, who regularly get pats on the back from fans around Birmingham who see them wearing UAB football gear. A bitter battle followed Watts’ initial announcement that UAB football was not financially viable and that the school would become the first FBS-level program to disband since 1995. The school reversed course a few months later following further study, creating the feel-good vibe that currently surrounds the program.
“There’s not a place in Birmingham I can go wearing UAB attire -- anything that says UAB football or anything like that associated with football -- and fans [aren’t] like, ‘We’re excited’ and ‘We’re happy,’” Jones said.

And this time, UAB intends to do it right. The city’s business leaders and program’s boosters have pledged financial support that the program never enjoyed before. The school is halfway through the process of raising funds to build a $15.3 million facility to house the football building, replacing the Blazers’ battered old fieldhouse.

The new building is tentatively slated to open in the summer of 2017, just before Clark’s team opens preseason camp.

The team has a dreary slate of practices ahead without any games to look forward to for the next year. However, once the roster expands further with 30 more scholarship players this summer, Clark plans to simulate game situations as best he can with scrimmages for the team and fans this fall.

“We’re going to play a scrimmage game at the end of August, we’re going to play one in October and we’re going to play one at the end [of the fall],” Clark said. “They’re going to be as game-like as we can make it: the band, cheerleaders, the fans, fireworks after. ... We want to practice, we want to have scrimmages and then hopefully we look up and it’s like December and January and we’re like everybody else.”

That’s the best way to approach the situation the Blazers find themselves in, said offensive lineman Lee Dufour.

He could be preparing for the upcoming season, having transferred to South Alabama after UAB disbanded the program, but Dufour returned as soon as he learned Blazers football was coming back. Waiting another 18 months to play another game is a small price to pay when he will get to do so for a program he has grown to love.

“You almost can’t think of it like 500-and-something days,” Dufour said. “You think of it as, ‘All right, we’ve got one more spring training, two more fall camps and then we’re playing a game.’”
UAB fans, former players get first look at Blazer football program since its return

By: Drew Champlin

UAB fans and several former players got their first look at real live Blazer football since 2014 on Saturday.

With a limited roster, head coach Bill Clark couldn't put together a spring game. So he did the next best thing - opened up a practice for the public to watch. Right after that, former Blazers took the field for the third annual Sons of UAB flag football game.

NFL players such as Roddy White, Joe Webb and Ty Long were back. So were Blazers of recent times, like linemen Billy Autrey, Hayden Naumann and Dom Sylvester, Blazers of not so far ago like receiver Bradly Chavez and Blazers from the nineties like punter Chris Maye and safety Justin Craft.

While Clark ran his 10th practice of the spring, fans shuttled in and out of UAB's BBVA Compass Stadium to get the first look at the new Blazers.

"Out here watching these guys makes me want to suit up again one more time for UAB," said Webb, who went to the Super Bowl with the Carolina Panthers this past season. "Seeing them out here on the field is a big step."

Webb had faith. He prayed every night for UAB football to return. So did White, the NFL all-pro who is looking for a new home after being released by the Atlanta Falcons last week.

"I'd been in contact with the athletic director (Mark Ingram) and Coach Clark," White said. "They were trying and pushing and moving and trying to get the program back and talking to people around the community. I knew we were heading in the right direction a long time ago."

Long, a kicker who just signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, had faith. So did Autrey, a starting offensive linemen for UAB from 2012-13.

"Something inside you just told you it's not over for good," Autrey said. "I feel like it's going to be even better when it comes back. It's almost a blessing in disguise. It (stunk) when it happened, but we're going to be just fine."

Autrey remains in the city working at Good People Brewing.

"Trying to be as Birmingham as possible," he said.

As a former player, he was allowed to attend a recent practice. His observations were that Bryant Novick, a former walk-on linemen who returned, had transformed his body. New offensive lineman Brandon Hill, who was not in pads Saturday, was fun to watch.
Chavez, a receiver for the Blazers from 2001-04, was back on campus, he estimated, for the first time since he got his degree in 2010. After spending three years as a receivers coach at Texas A&M-Kingsville, he's now a first-year head coach at St. John Paul II in Corpus Christi, Texas. He had his wife and two children with him on Saturday. He stayed connected to UAB through social media.

"I think it's something that's so good and something that has so much steam going ahead, it's hard to keep down," Chavez said.

Most of these players were at Legion Field this time last year. UAB didn't have a football program and didn't promote its alumni football game. Former players and Free UAB supporters did through a Facebook group and word spread. The city of Birmingham opened up Legion Field.

Clark started the alumni flag football game in 2014. Those connected to football wanted to see it live on.

"We didn't have a lot of fans, but we had a lot of participation from the old guys," Maye said.

While most people had faith UAB football would return, Maye admittedly wasn't one of them. He wasn't fully convinced until Clark signed his new five-year contract last fall. UAB's program was shuttered on Dec. 4, 2014, restored on June 1, 2015 and Clark's new contract was formally approved on Sept. 16.

"Watching the players come across the field, I got a little emotional," Maye said. I never thought it would be back. After standing out there on the 2nd of December, I never imagined. Especially being back like this, it's pretty awesome.

"Until you get him locked up, you don't really have anything. He's the reason that it's back and he's the reason that we all fought. Seeing him and the vision we had for the program, that's why we fought."

Sylvester had to take a medical hardship after the 2013 season due to a knee injury. He remained around the program and the New York native felt depressed when it was originally taken away.

"In the back of my mind, I was still thinking that my college experience was kind of tainted right now," Sylvester said. "All of my friends were transferring to different states. My best friend's in Oklahoma. I wasn't going to let the decision of a couple of individuals affect the rest of my life."

But he had hope that the program would return, and couldn't be more thankful for the Sons of UAB alumni game.

See next page
UAB will welcome around 30 new players this fall and will hold three scrimmages, with the first on Aug. 27. But Saturday was another step in the return. The Blazer Walk made way for players to walk from the football facility into BBVA Compass Stadium. There were fans, cheerleaders and a band.

And most importantly, there was football.

"It's so good to be out here seeing green and gold hitting each other," Autrey said. "It just feels right."

The White team beat the Green team 12-6 in the Sons of UAB game. Here's the game-winning score.
How eye-tracking could stop PII leaks

By: Staff

Biometric security is becoming more prevalent. More than 770 million biometric applications will be downloaded every year by 2019, Juniper Research said last year, quoted by CSO then. That's up from only 6 million identity-proving biometric apps in 2015. It will be big, then.

What we're usually thinking about, though, when biometrics are mentioned in the context of devices, is the proving of a person's identity, perhaps with fingerprints.

However, some scientists think that there's another way to approach biometrics. They think it doesn't have to simply be geared towards just the identifying and verification users. You can use it for security-related tracking too.

Behavioral researchers think that eye movement can be used to track the places a user looks at on a computer screen. Analyzing the viewed spots, including for how long, could let software provide specific messages pertaining to that content being viewed.

A use could be to advise computer users that they're about to give away PII, or sensitive personally identifiable information online, think professors at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. A kind of phishing-prevention tool, possibly.

Ironically, in this case, the eye tracker isn't primarily for identifying the person, as it's usually used in biometric security. Its purpose is to stop the person getting identified. They're using the same equipment, though.

"Displaying warnings in a dynamic manner that is more readily perceived and less easily dismissed by the user" is the goal, says the university's press release. By creating pop-ups that appear when a user looks at a field in a form, for example, the scientists think they can produce a more effective warning than something static in a text box. It's less same-old-same-old.

"I need to know how long the user's eyes stay on the area and I need to use that input in my research," says Mini Zeng a computer science doctoral student, who's been working on the project. Where the user's eyes are on the screen and for how long is calculated in the tracking.

If the user looks away from the PII-capturing form, the warning can be made to disappear. If the user looks back again, the warning flashes on the screen again and can stay there for a predetermined amount of time—to force the user to read it. The researchers think that it's the unpredictability of the warning flashing on the screen that adds to the effectiveness.

"If you get a warning every single time and it becomes annoying or habitual, you are going to ignore it," says Dr. Sandra Carpenter, a psychology professor in the press release.

Although the University of Alabama researchers don't mention, in their press release, how they see the system being implemented, presumably any web-based form that has a dubious intent could be made to display the dynamic warning, perhaps through URL whitelists and blacklists lookups. The warning could be independent of the website publisher.

See next page
And if an eye recognition biometric sensor hardware gets added to devices anyway, perhaps it could help with kids’ homework management. “Hey, you’ve been looking at that Instagram post a little too long, Get back to the work,” the message might say.
How American politics became so uncivil

By: Guest Voices

By Dr. Clarke Rountree, chairman of the Communication Arts Department at the University of Alabama at Huntsville. He earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in rhetorical studies at the University of Iowa, and his undergraduate degree in political science at UAH. His research interests are judicial rhetoric, political rhetoric, Burkeian rhetorical theory, argument theory, rhetoric and race, and religious discourse.

In 2009, when President Obama presented his health care plan to Congress, Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC) disturbed the House chamber and a nationally televised address by yelling out "You lie!" when Obama said that illegal immigrants would not be covered by his health care proposal.

Attendees at "town hall" rallies carried signs showing Obama as Hitler. Representative Alan Grayson (D-FL) claimed: "If you get sick, America, the Republican health care plan is this: Die quickly." Former GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin claimed that the health care law included "death panels" that would decide who was worthy of living and who would be left to die. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) compared Republican resistance to health care reform to those who resisted the abolition of slavery.

For years, Obama detractors pushed the idea that the 44th president of the United States was born in Africa and ineligible to be our nation's leader, including billionaire developer, television star, and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, leading Obama to release his long-form birth certificate from Hawaii to prove his citizenship. Liberal MSNBC commentator Ed Schultz called conservative commentator Laura Ingraham a "right-wing slut" and California National Organization for Women President Patty Bellasalma called GOP gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman "a political whore." More recently, Dr. Ben Carson, a GOP candidate for the 2016 presidential election, called President Obama a "psychopath."

Most Americans don't need to hear examples like these to recognize that we live in an age of political incivility. Such incivility leads to political polarization, legislative gridlock, and cynicism about government. Although we have suffered through rancorous times before — the Civil War era being the most notable — today's incivility is different. In a two-volume edited book I published in 2013, Venomous Speech: Problems in American Political Discourse on the Right and Left (Praeger), 23 scholars explored different facets of the problem of incivility today. I opened the book by explaining what I see as the key causes of our current political dysfunction. In this essay I will summarize those causes and explain why it may be difficult to change this situation in the short run. Three major causes of this incivility are the media revolution, the campaign finance revolution, and the reshuffling of political parties.

The media revolution started shortly after the Watergate scandal that toppled President Nixon and inspired journalists to be aggressive in rooting out corruption. That aggressiveness is reflected in a number of minor scandals that the media blew up into major news stories, often

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adding "-gate" to the end, such as Billygate (Carter), Irangate (Reagan), Troopergate (Clinton), Plamegate (Bush II), Bridgegate (NJ Governor Christie), and many others.

The media became more interested in pursuing such stories with the advent of 24/7 television news after the launch of CNN in 1980 and several other news channels since then. The proliferation of cable channels led to "narrowcasting," whereby smaller and smaller audiences were reached by each channel, and networks could adapt their programming to political tastes, with Fox addressing conservatives and MSNBC addressing liberals.

Instead of serving a broad audience as a public service, these news stations are required to turn a profit and rely on cheap, talking heads rather than expensive investigative reports to fill the endless news cycle. Those talking heads often draw bigger audiences by taking controversial positions, vilifying their political opponents, and engaging in dramatic disputes.

The Internet revolution took this media revolution to its ultimate end, allowing anyone with a computer to become a webcaster to the world. Those with a political axe to grind could float unsubstantiated, scurrilous rumors about politicians and their proposals. If they had enough followers that could lead major news organizations, whose stories are otherwise limited by journalistic standards and ethics, to respond to the "buzz" created by popular bloggers as news that has to be covered.

This is how the ridiculous claims about Obama's "African" birthplace got legs and how a Dallas minister was able to undermine GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney by publicly calling his Mormon religion "a cult." Today's news media are shaped by a circulation of ideas between fringe figures on the web and major news media whose ability to filter our scandalous and unsubstantiated claims has been seriously eroded.

Of course, not all such incivility is propagated freely by the press; much of it is in paid advertisements. While George W. Bush was the first president to raise $100 million for his presidential bid in 2000, Obama's first race raised about $1 billion. And that was before the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Citizens United v. FEC released a tsunami of money into our political system. That decision gutted important parts of the 2007 McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Act. The result is that in 2012, several wealthy donors contributed $10 million to favored campaigns.

The conservative Koch brothers have pledged almost $1 billion from their political organization to help elect a Republican president in 2016. Third-party organizations spend a great deal of money on negative advertising, attacking candidates so their own preferred politicians can win. Because they are not supposed to coordinate with candidates — though some undoubtedly do so tacitly or surreptitiously — they can be more vitriolic, because the candidates can hold them at arms-length and worry less about the negativity reflecting on themselves.

The negativity seen in campaigns also has been increased by the polarization of the leading political parties. Before the 1980s, Northeastern moderates and liberal Democrats would have to compromise with more conservative Southern Democrats to get things done. Republicans would have to pull together liberals and moderates from the Northeast, West Coast, and Midwest. And

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both parties would reach across the aisle to get legislation passed. That all began to change with President Lyndon Johnson's push for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which alienated Southern Democrats and opened the door for Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" to peel off conservative Democrats by going soft on civil rights.

President Reagan was the master of this strategy, combining an appeal to Christian evangelicals by allying with the Moral Majority, a newly active political group led by Reverend Jerry Falwell. Both Bushes followed suit, by allying with the Christian Coalition (Bush I) and Focus on the Family (Bush II). Issues like abortion and school prayer helped solidify the divide. Gerrymandering — both to ensure African-American equity at the voting booth and to ensure political advantage — has become the primary means for consolidating political power. It also has given greater power to the fringes of both parties who turn out to primaries (where only one-third of voters show up) and choose party candidates. These candidates speak to their base, leading to more corrosive discourse than would be required if they addressed a more centrist audience.

It is clear that the economics and culture of our news media, campaign financing, and reshuffling of political parties have made our discourse less civil. Is there anything we can do to change this situation? Unfortunately, there are few practicable solutions.

We could amend the Constitution to overturn the Citizens United decision and reduce the role of self-interested billionaires in our political process; but passing such an amendment is nearly impossible for those with a vested interested in maintaining the status quo. More likely is that a conservative vacancy on the Supreme Court might lead to a more progressive replacement that could reverse that 5-4 decision.

We could reduce the election period, lessening the period of negative attacks — Great Britain's elections last only six weeks. However, political parties and states control this process now and states probably would not sacrifice the chance for politicians to woo them by visiting and learning about their concerns. Third parties might break up the tit-for-tat feud between the Democrats and Republicans, but our political system is decidedly unfriendly to third parties. And experience with the recently inaugurated Tea Party — which has been among the most vitriolic sources of political discourse — does not suggest that new parties will yield more civility.

We could move elections to the weekend to encourage greater participation of the electorate and reduce the influence of voters on the far right and left, but Republicans actually are moving toward making voting less convenient through new voter ID laws to "crack down" on nonexistent voter fraud, resulting in the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of voters. The only realistic effort we can undertake will have minor consequences: ensuring that public broadcasting continues to be supported (in the face of efforts to defund it), because it is one of the last bastions of political news that prefers substantive discussions over scandal, drama, and the "horse race" of elections.

This is a depressing situation for our republic and one that likely will get much worse before voters actually rise up and demand change. For the immediate future, unfortunately, people will just accept that politics is a cynical game.
Jeff Bezos talks Amazon, space, how he works and Elon Musk in first ever tour of Blue Origin

By: Lee Roop

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos answered questions from reporters for nearly four hours Tuesday while leading the first-ever tour of his Blue Origin rocket plant outside Seattle, but he clearly had a favorite.

"What would surprise Wernher von Braun if he could see this plant?" a reporter asked, and Bezos' eyes lit up. "That's an excellent question!" he said.

"A lot would be very familiar," Bezos said. The basics of rocketry haven't changed since "the greatest hits from the '60s," he said, but what has changed are "the manufacturing techniques you use."

A 2013 expedition led by Bezos recovered one of the Apollo 11 engines that first sent men to the moon from the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, and Bezos called those Saturn-era engines "incredible, hand-welded works of art."

But von Braun "would be amazed," Bezos said, "at the manufacturing techniques" of today. He mentioned additive manufacturing (3-D printing) and modern computer simulation, which can dramatically speed new model parts. And he said Blue Origin can literally "model combustion inside a chamber" on its computers.

No signs in front

Wearing a brown sweater, blue shirt and jeans, Bezos met 11 reporters at Blue Origin's plant in Kent Washington just south of Seattle. Built by Boeing to build the massive drills that dug the underwater tunnel linking England to France, the 300,000 square-foot factory has no signs out front to identify it reflecting the company's legendary secrecy.

Blue Origin's 600 employees are diverse and range from aerospace veterans to 30-something engineers trained in schools from the University of Alabama in Huntsville to Purdue. They bring their dogs to work, and they all enter past a meeting area with "a single coffee pot" Bezos said encourages casual interaction. On the way, they pass a round, open gas fire pit whose flames rise into the bottom of a two-story rocket model built Jules Verne style. The effect is like rocket exhaust, and the model's upper story opens into an intricately designed, Steam Punk-style conference room.

Space collectibles real and fanciful fill the lobby - that's a U.S.S. Enterprise model used in two "Star Trek" movies over there - and a wall mural shows Blue Origin's logo and guiding motto "Gradatim Ferociter," Latin for "step by step, ferociously."

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Bezos led reporters down two flights of stairs to a sprawling and spotless main factory floor where teams are building capsules and fuel tanks for Blue Origin's New Shepard space tourism rockets, named for first American astronaut Alan Shepard. Photographs were not allowed due to legal security restrictions.

The company has "thousands" of waiting customers and plans to fly its first test pilots in 2017 and paying passengers in 2018, Bezos said. "By the time anybody goes on it," he said of New Shepard, "you should be able willing to bring your mom and kids." Bezos left little doubt he will be a passenger, too.

State of the art

The sprawling plant is state of the rocket-building art with milling machines the size of combines and 3D-printers that build blocks of space age alloy one powdered line at a time and then use lasers to carve parts from those blocks.

The company has two product lines now: the New Shepard rocket and a new BE-4 engine (Blue Engine 4) designed to power the new Vulcan rocket being developed by United Launch Alliance for assembly at the company's plant in Decatur, Ala. Later plans for "scaling up" New Shepard for larger missions.

Bezos has degrees in computer science and electrical engineering from Princeton and has been fascinated with space "since I was five years old." A personal fortune estimated at $58 billion is funding Blue Origin, and Bezos considers himself "incredibly fortunate" to do that. He "won a lottery called Amazon," Bezos said, and now "can fulfill my childhood dream."

Michael Krene, development leader of Blue Origin's new BE-4 engine, worked on rocket engines including the Space Shuttle Main Engine for 19 years at Rocketdyne. Watching Bezos interact with reporters and employees on the floor, where he constantly chimed in to add to his young engineers' presentations, Krene said his boss's commitment is real and deep.

"He doesn't just want to make it happen," Krene said. "He wants to be a part of making it happen."

Bezos is typically at the plant on Wednesdays, and he talked about his work routine. He doesn't like multi-tasking, Bezos said, and only pursues what he's passionate about. Those things "give me energy," Bezos said.

A Bezos day sounds like a series of meetings and conversations where he enters a space, listens, questions and seeks consensus. Blue Origin's employees pay attention to him on the tour, but seem comfortable with him and talk confidently and without notes about their specialties.

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Talking about Amazon

Bezos himself talked easily and laughed loudly on the tour, and he joked about Amazon. When one reporter asked how rocket engines built in Washington get to Blue Origin's test facilities in west Texas, another reporter joked, "Amazon, right?" Bezos replied, "Two-day delivery."

In a conference room over lunch, which for him was a salad with a little luncheon meat on the side, Bezos answered questions in turn from each reporter present. He was polite and open, and his eyes lit up at questions he liked. "It's my total pleasure," he said at one point. "I hope you can sense that I like this."

Bezos wouldn't discuss finances or the size of his investment in Blue Origin, but everything else was fair game. He delayed another meeting to stay longer, waving off a subordinate's time check warning, but he left quickly when he decided a second round of questions had reached a point of "diminishing returns."

Bezos talked about his serious reasons for pursuing spaceflight, and he rejected the suggestion that space tourism is essentially a frivolous pursuit. Technologies from airplanes to computers were improved by the demands of barnstormers and gamers, he said. "If you look at the early days of almost any technology, one of the drivers of the technology is entertainment," Bezos said. "It's not frivolous."

Asked about SpaceX founder Elon Musk and the duo's relationship, Bezos said, "I know him. We've talked to each other many times. I think we're very like-minded about a lot of things. We're not twins in terms of our conceptualization of the future or how space should develop, but there's a lot of similarities."

Asked if the trajectory of Blue Origin and Space are similar, Bezos said, "Not really. I don't know a lot about the comparison points. I know a lot about Blue Origin, but I know very little about other space companies except for what I read in the press."

Bezos said, "All I can tell you is I want a lot of ways to go into space, and I hope all of these companies succeed."
UAH students and professors help Army in developing new technology

By: Aimee L'Eplattenier

HUNTSVILLE, AL (WAFF) -

Nathan Lawrence knew water was involved in an experiment he was helping with, he just didn't know how much.

He thought he was going to be behind a desk collecting data from a computer. Instead, he was going into the chamber of artificial rain collecting data.

Lawrence is a UAH aerospace engineering major from Florence who, along with Michael Newchurch who is a professor at UAH, and UAH student Ross Sargent, are testing prototype tractors.

David Bowdle, an aerosol research consultant at ARC, Professor Kevin Knupp, a professor of atmospheric science at UAH, and the Marshall Space Flight Center's Dr. Patrick Gatlin provided expertise with the instrumentation and measurements.

"They are testing prototype trackers in a variety of atmospheric conditions, including fog, rain, dust, and smoke, in other words, the variety of conditions you might run into on the battlefield," Newchurch said. "Because we know about these things they asked us to characterize the rain and fog droplet distributions to verify conditions inside the test chamber were accurate reproductions of conditions you might have to deal with in nature."

They measured rain droplet distribution while the laser was operating, taking measurements.

Once they had finished testing the tractor in the heavy artificial rain they started with fog.

"The fog chamber is about 60 feet long and you could barely see from one end to the other," Newchurch said.

Project scientists and engineers with the Army's Advanced Weather Tracker program are still working to see which laser frequency is the most efficient in rain, fog, smoke, and dust.

UAH's participation was funded through the Army's Space and Missile Defense Command.

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February Tornadoes Hit Florida Hard

A bad tornado year in the South has researchers taking a closer look

By: Ted Cushman

Just as experts had anticipated, Florida got slammed by killer tornadoes in late February. The Pensacola News-Journal had a report on February 24 (see: "Tornado aftermath: 300+ homes destroyed, damaged"). "As of 1 p.m. in Escambia County, damage assessment crews documented 37 destroyed, 76 major and 100 minor damaged structures in the county," the paper reported.

'The city of Pensacola, assessments are concentrated in the northern parts of the city. Significantly affected areas include the Dunmire Woods area, Dunmire Street moving northeast to Le Grande. Field checks found there were 100 residential structures with damage. Thirty of these were major damage and 70 were minor damage." Many news outlets were carrying drone video shot by John Oldshue of Southersky.com.

The active tornado season this winter and early spring is giving researchers a chance to learn more about tornado risks in the South, reported the Palm Beach Post (see: "Unique tornado study focuses on deadly Dixie Alley," by Kimberly Miller). "Dubbed Vortex Southeast, the $5 million plan includes multiple studies from the mechanics of southeastern tornadoes to understanding the way southerners react to tornado warnings and whether they are equipped to handle an approaching cyclone. The southeast is heavy with ultra-vulnerable mobile homes where owners may be far from shelter," the paper reported.

But the initiative put scientists in a peculiar position, familiar to reporters who specialize in covering disasters: Are the researchers actually hoping for more tornadoes to strike this spring? The Huntsville Times covered the effort here (see: "Hoping for tornadoes? South's largest tornado research project underway in Alabama," by Paul Gattis). From the report: "Is this group of dozens of scientists from around the country mobilized at the University of Alabama in Huntsville the only people in the state hoping for tornadoes? 'Yes and no,' said Erik Rasmussen, the project coordinator for the $5 million study dubbed Vortex Southeast. 'There isn't one of these researchers I've worked with for all these years who enjoy seeing that. It's always a thrill to view a tornado but the destruction is just not fun.' Still, Rasmussen said, 'We need to have them.'"
Updated satellite data shows more warming

By: Scott K. Johnson

As the pace of warming has shot up, politicians have responded in part by casting doubt on the global temperature data. They've argued that we should ignore surface data sets and pay attention to satellite measurements of the upper atmosphere, which just happen to show a little less warming in recent years. The work that goes into maintaining all of these data sets is pretty complex—enough so that we recently dedicated about 5,000 words to the subject.

One of the people we talked to for that story was Carl Mears, who helps run one of the major satellite data sets of upper air temperatures. Mears explained the calibrations and corrections that go into that data set and frankly discussed the uncertainties surrounding it. Overall, he felt that the uncertainties of the satellites' data were greater than those for surface data sets like those run by NASA and the UK Met Office.

Building on analysis of that uncertainty, Mears and his colleague Frank Wentz have published a paper describing an update to their data set—one that ends up increasing the warming trend significantly.

The biggest source of error in the satellite measurements is that the satellites can't maintain a clockwork orbit forever. Over the years, the time of day that they pass over your house (for example) gradually drifts. So even in a Groundhog Day scenario where every day's weather is identical, the satellites could measure a change in temperature over time simply because they are making measurements later and later in the day.

It's a very difficult problem to adjust for. Mears and the Remote Sensing Systems (RSS) crew have been using a climate model to estimate the impact of this time-of-day drift on the satellite measurements. But they were under no illusions that this provided a perfected correction. The new update resulted from looking for improvements.

They started by testing three very different methods. Working with the second generation of these satellites, which started coming online in 1999, they first excluded all the measurements made by satellites going through the part of their life where the time-of-day drift was greatest. They then tried using the two satellites that successfully maintained rock-steady orbits using thrusters as references to adjust the others. Finally, they applied a tweaked version of their climate model adjustment.

All three techniques had pretty similar results, giving the researchers confidence that they were on the right track. Only the climate model adjustment can work with the first-generation satellites, though, so that's the one they're using in this new version of their data set. The new work does a little better job of effectively applying the patterns from the climate model to the actual measurements.

The new version of their mid-troposphere record, which is meant to represent temperatures about 5 kilometers above the surface, now shows a stronger warming trend. From the start of the record in 1979 through 2014, the warming trend increases from 0.078 °C per decade to 0.125 °C per decade.
decade. (For comparison, surface data sets show trends closer to 0.16 °C per decade.) The researchers have yet to update their lower troposphere record. That has shown more warming than its mid-troposphere counterpart, and its trend will likely increase as well.

For one test of the updated record, the researchers compared it to satellite measurements of water vapor they also maintain. Over the tropics, warm, moist air from the surface rises strongly, such that the amount of atmospheric water vapor should be very closely tied to temperature. The updated record fit pretty closely, as did another satellite dataset run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The University of Alabama in Huntsville record, which is run by prominent climate “skeptics” John Christy and Roy Spencer, stood out as a much poorer fit. However, a pending update to that record looks like it will bring it a little closer to the rest of the pack.

In either version of either data set, February has set a new record for warmest month in the satellite record. As expected, the warmth of the El Niño in the tropical Pacific helped 2015 smash the surface temperature records and is now showing up in the upper atmosphere records. That spells trouble for those who have tried to (incorrectly) use the El-Niño boosted peak of 1998 to argue that satellite records currently show no warming.

In a commentary piece just last week, Congressman Lamar Smith (R-Texas), who has subpoenaed e-mails from NOAA scientists and accused them of manipulating their data to inflate recent warming, repeated his sentiment that satellite records are the gold standard. “Atmospheric satellite data, considered by many to be the most reliable, has clearly showed no warming for the past two decades,” he wrote, “This fact is well documented, but it does not fit the liberal politics of the administration or the national media.”

We’ll have to see if that rhetoric changes now.
Tornado experts ‘watching, not hoping’

Scientists taking part in largest Southeast tornado study

Paul Gattis pgage@al.com

As the largest tornado research project to take place in the Deep South began last week, an awkward question lingered.

Are these dozens of scientists from around the country mobilized at the University of Alabama in Huntsville the only people in the state hoping for tornadoes?

"Yes and no," said Erik Rasmussen, the project coordinator for the $5 million study dubbed Vortex Southeast, short for Verification of the Origins of Rotation in Tornadoes Experiment-Southeast. "There isn’t one of these researchers I’ve worked with for all these years who enjoy seeing that. It’s always a thrill to view a tornado, but the destruction is just not fun."

Still, Rasmussen said, "We need to have them."

And history indicates they will. Tornadoes for the past 30 years have been confirmed in north Alabama, not to mention beyond region. And the study is not confined to north Alabama.

"If they come along, we’ll sample them," said Kevin Knupp, the lead tornado researcher at UAH and director of SWIRL — the Severe Weather Institute and Radar & Lightning Laboratories that is headquartered for Vortex Southeast.

"I don’t want to be quoted as hoping for tornadoes," Knupp said.

"If we just have average conditions, we’ll get a good sample. Some of the work we do, we don’t need tornadoes to study the complexities (of the storm). We just need conditions that are close to producing tornadoes."

Knupp said it’s a feather in the weather research hat at UAH to serve as host for Vortex Southeast — a project that runs through April and involves researchers from six different divisions of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, including the National Weather Service.

There are also researchers from NASA, as well as the National Science Foundation, National Center for Atmospheric Research and 16 universities.

U.S. Rep. Robert Adenhoft, R-Haleyville, described the project as "preparing to head off a new frontier of exploring and researching these many (tornado) issues."

The bulk of tornado research has taken place in the Great Plains states. But tornadoes in Oklahoma are formed differently than those in Alabama. Rasmus sen said, and understanding Deep South tornadoes is a critical component of the study.

"I think it’s high time we paid attention to how things are different in other parts of the country," he said.

With the trees and hills of north Alabama, tracking tornadoes is far more difficult than in the vast expanses of the Great Plains.

Vortex Southeast will also continue Knupp’s studies about topography and surface roughness being tornado catalysts.

"The big differences are our ability to observe in the plains," said Rasmus sen, a researcher at the University of Oklahoma working with the National Severe Storms Laboratory. "It’s pretty wide open. We’ve got all the roads we need to maneuver around storms and get within hundreds of yards of what we’re trying to observe.

"When you’re driving around this part of Alabama, you only have this much of the sky visible (as Rasmussen held his hands above his head about one foot apart). We don’t really know what’s coming. It’s completely different. We really can’t do storm chasing. We’re going to try that a little bit. But by and large, we can’t storm chase like we do in the plains."

Instead, the trust will be put in the array of instruments brought by the research universities participating in the study.

"The idea here is to put together a scientifically sound network of instruments, turn them all on and make darn sure they are collecting good data and let the storms move through," Rasmussen said. "We’re going to learn a lot from that."

But as far as hoping for tornadoes, the researchers know it’s not really necessary in Alabama in the spring. Year after year, the storms come.

"We’re looking at an active period in the middle of March," Knupp said. "There’s potential to have a significant outbreak in the southeast so we’re watching that."

 Watching, but not hoping."
Weather Talk: Thank El Nino for warm February

By: John Wheeler

Based on satellite observation of infrared data around the world, February was the most anomalously warm month on record. The satellite record goes back to 1979. There are two primary causes for the unusually warm weather. El Niño is responsible for heating the atmosphere in the tropics and mid-latitudes. But the Arctic has been unusually warm this winter, peaking these past few weeks. Dr. John Christy, director of the Earth System Science Center at The University of Alabama in Huntsville, says that large temperature swings are common in the Arctic region during winter, but do not typically last all that long. So as the El Niño fades this summer, the globally averaged temperature should drop from the present record anomaly but will likely remain well above the long-term average. Here in the Fargo-Moorhead area, the weather has been consistently warmer than average since the end of last summer.
Hoping for tornadoes? South's largest tornado research project underway in Alabama

By: Paul Gattis

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Watching, but not hoping.
Discovery students, ISS astronauts chat

By: Gregg Parker

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Watching, but not hoping.
New master plan this spring promises big changes for Cummings Research Park

By: Lucy Berry

The new master plan for Cummings Research Park is on schedule for a spring debut as officials wrap up final plans for the technology hub in Huntsville.

CRP Director Erin Kosht said there are about six weeks left in the master planning process, which began in September with help from architecture and design firm Perkins+Will. A new plan proposing big changes is expected in early- to mid-April.

Koshut said they want to leverage the decades-old park's previous success for another 50 years of innovation.

"It's about going from good to great," she said. "It's about taking that 85 percent occupancy rate and pushing it back up into the 90s. There are going to be some recommendations that come forward and changes that come forward that really move the needle."

Master planning process

CRP is the nation's second-largest research park with more than 300 companies and 29,000 employees. Officials hope an updated master plan will bring CRP into the future, produce jobs, attract and retain businesses and lure young professionals to the area.

The final two phases of the planning process will focus on master plan development, concept testing, and marketing strategy and positioning, such as uses, restrictions and zoning, connectivity in and around the park, mobility and how to make CRP a community-based destination.

The CRP team is working closely with the City of Huntsville, which recently unveiled an urban renewal plan for CRP East, the original and oldest section of the park. The plan is composed of four priority zones, the first of which is the Madison Square Mall area at University Drive and Old Monrovia Road.

Other priorities include Old Madison Pike/Wynn Drive where Calhoun Community College is expanding; Bradford Drive/Wynn Drive where Redstone Federal Credit Union is based; and Sparkman Drive/University Drive where the Executive Plaza office building operates.

Serving businesses

Koshut said CRP does a great job of serving large- and medium-size businesses, as well as startup companies through BizTech, HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology and the planned incubator at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. As the park moves forward, she hopes to see CRP support the entire "lifecycle of growth" for companies that want to have a presence there.

She said the single vs. multi-tenant ordinance in CRP restricts buildings from hosting more than three tenants at once.

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"We need places and spaces where we can have three, four, five times that many companies in one single building," she said.

Another idea includes reducing setbacks inside the park, allowing for potential greenways that connect in and around the buildings. Koshut said they may cut back on parking requirements for building footprints, add sidewalks, connect lakes on the west side and create a dedicated food truck park.

Acquiring property is also an option, but Koshut said there are other ways to utilize vacant properties to change the mix and feel of the park.

Koshut said there is no price point associated with revitalization of CRP, but they will explore all funding options as they begin implementing the master plan.

Funding sources

"Let's drive what needs to happen and then let's figure out what the budget number is and then how do we build that and implement that over cycles and look for additional funding sources," she said. "I think that allows the park to develop in a way that it needs to develop rather than from a completely money standpoint."

Koshut has visited research parks across the U.S. since she was hired to replace former Director John Southerland last summer. Chamber of Commerce spokeswoman Carrie Rice said Koshut is "taking the best of everything" from her travels to make CRP viable for another half century.

CRP has increased its community presence on Facebook, Twitter and through a monthly newsletter. Koshut said the park has several big events planned this year, including Geek-to-Geek, the Trolley Tech Tour, Sips and Sounds, Yoga in the Park, Idea Roundtables, food trucks, Double Helix Dash and the Bridge Street Half Marathon.

"These are some of the things and activities that employees and the companies have said they wanted so we're going to roll them out and hopefully have everybody attend and get excited," she said.
Trustees to consider tuition increase

The trustees for the Alabama Community College System will be asked when they meet in April to consider a tuition increase for the fall and the next step in plans to create two regional colleges by consolidating seven exiting campuses.

The trustees discussed potential agenda items for April during a work session on Tuesday.

Under the proposed tuition increase, rates per credit hour would increase $2 to $117 for Alabama residents and $232 for nonresidents beginning in fall 2016.

"I think a lot of us in the room wish we didn’t have to do that," System Chancellor Mark Heinrich said. "I think most of us in the room wish that tuition was frankly lower ... but we are so thin right now, we need that extra amount."

The move would generate about $4 million to be shared among the 26 campuses statewide, said Director of Fiscal Services Jane Leatherwood. The funds will help offset the continued increases in operational costs, according to the system.

The annual increase was established by the Alabama Board of Education, which formerly oversaw the two-year system, in 2009 following successive years of proration.

The board must decide annually whether to continue with the scheduled increases. The tuition increase does not affect Marion Military Institute and the Alabama Technology Network.

In April, the administration also plans to ask the board to approve new names, main campus designations, and mission statements for the proposed regional community colleges. The vote is the next step in a process that the trustees began in December with approval of the preliminary consolidation plans. The system plans to ask the board for final approval of the consolidations in July.

The phased process begins with the administrative consolidation of the colleges, followed by a later programmatic consolidation. The system plans to request approval of the plans for both phases at the same time.

The southern consolidation includes Alabama Southern, Jefferson Davis, Reid State and Faulkner State community colleges. The central consolidation includes Central Alabama, Chattahoochee Valley, and Southern Union State community colleges.

The names, main campuses and mission statements are details that will be required for a prospectus the system plans to submit to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the system's accrediting agency. SACS is among the agencies that...
must approve the plans if they are to go forward. The system hopes to conclude its discussion of the new names, main campuses and mission statement in the next few weeks, according to staff on Monday.

During public comments at its regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, trustees heard from local officials and others representing the home communities for Central Alabama and Southern Union. The delegations each argued for their community college to become the administrative hub for the planned regional school, arguing the merits of local investment, geography and the size of their home campuses.

As Opelika Mayor Gary Fuller argued for Southern Union, he also expressed concerns about the pace of the consolidation process. "To some of us, this seems this process is being rushed regarding our colleges," Fuller said. "There is not any legitimate reason I know of to rush the process."

The system plans to present SACS with a prospectus on April 8, according to a work session presentation. To meet the timeline, the system will submit an incomplete prospectus with the understanding that the missing details will be added after they are approved by the board on April 13.

On Tuesday, the board approved statements of intent to consolidate, which will be presented on Friday to the Alabama Commission of Higher Education, the coordinating board for higher education in the state. The system must also keep the U.S. Department of Education abreast of its plans.

The statement of intent for the southern Alabama regional college approved Monday did not include Reid State. In February, trustees discussed handling the college separately because, unlike the other campuses that are accredited by SACS, Reid is accredited by the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education. The consolidation is more complex as a result, according to the February presentation. Plans discussed in February called for focusing on the plan for Alabama Southern, Jefferson Davis, and Faulkner State first and returning to SACS with a specific plan for Reid afterward.
UNIVERSITY OF WEST ALABAMA

Plan could boost online programs

UWA seeks partnership with education company

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON — The University of West Alabama board of trustees is considering an agreement with a for-profit online education company which would help the regional institution enhance and market its online programs for a share of new tuition revenues generated as a result of the partnership.

The board’s finance committee will continue consideration of a proposed contract with Learning House, a Kentucky-based company specializing in online education.

The proposal being considered by the board is a seven-year agreement under which Learning House would help UWA develop and market online courses in exchange for 48 percent of the revenues from the new undergraduate online student enrollment and 25 percent for graduate education courses, an area in which UWA already has well-established programs.

“They are going to be able to do things that we can’t do,” said Jan Miller, dean of the division of online programs.

The company, which employs 365, has 65 partner institutions, serving 20,000 students with 7,500 courses, according to a presentation on Monday.

While the university has experience and faculty expertise, it does not have deep resources to market the programs, according to Miller.

Learning House will work with faculty providing expertise about best practices in developing online courses, Miller said. The faculty will still be in charge of the content of the courses, she said.

The company will also provide marketing and student services, including admission assistance and success coaches.

“Industry leaders view this as a significant capital investment,” said Jay Hatcher, vice president of business development for Learning House. “We tailor our contract and solution to the needs of the institution.”

The company has done extensive market research, and in collaboration with UWA staff, has developed a program it thinks can be successful, Hatcher said.

UWA approached the company about its services, Hatcher said.
UWA
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Provost Tim Edwards and others administrators began researching the possibility of partnering with an online education company after being approached by another provider in the fall. Learning House provides more benefits than the other vendors, UWA President Ken Tucker said.

"It's my feeling we need to do something dramatic and bold to relaunch our online programs," Edwards said.

The academic affairs committee recommended sending the proposal to the finance committee in a 3-1 vote with Chairman Randy Hillman as the dissenting member. Trustees Jean Anderson, Jerry Smith and John Killian voted in favor of the proposal.

"You are talking about a significant investment from both the Learning House and the university. This is not something I am comfortable with jumping in right now," Hillman said, arguing he was not opposed in principle but wanted more time to review the contract. Smith argued the administration had done its due diligence. Hillman raised concerns about the percentage of revenue paid to the company and a lack of a termination clause in the proposed contract.

Miller, Edwards and Tucker argued the university would be trading a share of the revenue for the company's work to boost enrollment and offerings in the online programs.

"Fifty-two percent of something is better than 100 percent of nothing," Tucker said.

Tucker argued that while changes last year to the rates and structures of online programs had made them more competitive, UWA still lacks adequate resources to market its programs and achieve the growth it wants in a crowded market.

"We are going to have to find significant marketing and advertising dollars if we want to be successful," Tucker said. "People don't know about the quality product we have and how we care for our students."

Finance committee Chairman Alex Saad also advocated for further review by trustees but also saw an opportunity for the university to take its online program to the next level.

"I think we need to discuss it a great deal before we make a decision on it. But we need to make a decision at some time," Saad said.
UNIVERSITY OF WEST ALABAMA

Board OKs online doctorate degree

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of West Alabama board of trustees on Monday approved plans to notify the Alabama Commission on Higher Education of UWA's intent to submit a proposal to create an online doctorate degree in education. The proposed degree would be UWA's first doctoral degree.

"This proposed Ed.D. is really a perfect example of our strategy of creating new products and delving into new markets," said UWA President Ken Tucker.

The notice of the plans start a process that, if approved by ACHE, will likely take a couple of years to develop the degree program and begin offer it to students. ACHE would have to grant UWA permission to change to a doctorate granting institution as well as approve the proposed degree.

The university made a similar request a few years ago to become a doctorate-granting institution but was rejected on the grounds it was not prepared for the move, according to Provost Tim Edwards.

Edwards predicted the planned program in rural education will be unique enough to earn approval from the commission, which has been consulted about the possibility.

"It would be a unique degree and obviously fits our historical mission," Edwards said.

The university already has the faculty to teach the courses, Edwards said. The provost and Miller envision the doctorate as an online degree program serving educators and central office staff working in rural school systems.

"(The program) will teach teachers how to best meet the needs of students in rural areas," said Jan Miller, dean of the division of online programs.

Miller would also like to create a center for rural education.

"We want to be the go-to place when you talk about rural education," Miller said.

The proposed degree would include two tracks, instructional leadership and curriculum instruction.

The program would prepare students for the challenges facing rural systems, such as limited financial resources. The focus would be on practical coursework and action-based research versus a traditional doctoral model with a dissertation.
WILLIAM LEE went into last season's Conference USA Tournament not knowing what the end result would bring.

Seriously, the 6-foot-9 Lee joked Tuesday that he didn't know that if UAB won, the Blazers would play in the NCAA Tournament. They did, and Lee hit the eventual go-ahead bucket in the Blazers' upset win over No. 3 seed Iowa State.

One year removed, Lee is more mature on the court. Lee was named Conference USA Defensive Player of the Year on Tuesday.

Lee started off the year slow, but now averages 10.6 points per game and just over six rebounds per game. His 97 blocks, three per game, lead Conference USA and are among the nation's best.

The shot-blocking talnets developed early. Lee, nicknamed "HaHa," was always taller than everyone else. As a freshman at Dallas County, his coach told him to focus on rebounding and blocked shots.

Later, the offensive game came. His wiry frame makes him more of a "jump shooter" than a banger down low, but he's working on that. He's absolutely made his defensive mark, though.

"HaHa has had so many defining moments on both ends of the floor in close games so far this season," UAB head coach Jerod Haase said. "He is an elite shot blocker and one of the few players in college basketball who can dominate a game with his ability to block and change shots."

Lee said his favorite block came this season against Georgia State, when he grabbed the ball out of the air and just caught it. Teammate Dirk Williams said that was his favorite, too.

Lee's shot-blocking instincts have helped for a team that sometimes struggles to guard the basketball. Lee and Tosin Mehiniti have formed a strong back line.

"It's more of an instinct," Lee said. "I don't think you can practice blocking shots because of all of the pump fakes and different things during the game. It comes as an instinct.

"When they leave their feet, I leave my feet and try to go get it."

He faced much smaller forwards in rural

Plannersville, Ala., but now says the key against taller forwards is to "jump higher."

Lee knows that UAB's reward for winning the Conference USA championship is a trip to the NCAA. Even as the higher seed — UAB plays a quarterfinal on Thursday at noon at Legacy Arena — there isn't any pressure.

"It's kind of a big deal what we're playing for," Lee said. "Just go out there and play hard, play as a team. Throw a lot of energy and enthusiasm and hopefully things will go our way."
Retin Obasohan racks up SEC accolades, including Scholar-Athlete of the Year

SEC Tournament Schedule
First Round: Wednesday (On SECN)
G1: 12 Tennessee vs. 13 Auburn, 7 p.m.
Second Round: Thursday (on SECN)
G2: 9 Arkansas vs. 8 Florida, noon
G3: G1 Winner vs. 5 Vanderbilt, 2:30 p.m.
G4: 10 Alabama vs. 7 Ole Miss, 6 p.m.
G5: 11 Miss. State vs. 6 Georgia, 8:30 p.m.
Third Round: Friday (on SECN)
G6: G2 Winner vs. 1 Texas A&M, noon
G7: G3 Winner vs. 4 LSU, 2:30 p.m.
G8: G4 Winner vs. 2 Kentucky, 6 p.m.
G9: G5 Winner vs. 3 South Carolina, 8:30 p.m.
Semifinals: Saturday (on ESPN)
G10: G6 Winner vs. G7 Winner, noon
G11: G8 Winner vs. G9 Winner, 2:30 p.m.
Championship: Sunday (on ESPN)
Game 12: G10 Winner vs. G11 Winner, noon

Matt Zenitz  mzenitz@al.com

Retin Obasohan was on Alabama’s practice court Tuesday morning, using his phone to Snapchat himself taking shots when he got the call from coach Avery Johnson.

Johnson led in with “Retin, I’ve got something to tell you” before sharing that Obasohan had received three prominent honors — SEC Men’s Basketball Scholar-Athlete of the Year, first-team All-SEC and the SEC All-Defensive Team.

“I had no idea it was coming out today,” Obasohan, Alabama’s senior point guard, said. “When he told me, I almost dropped the phone.”

This is the latest recognition for Obasohan, the unquestioned leader of a Tide team that finished the regular season 17-13 after being picked to finish second-to-last in the SEC during the preseason.

After averaging just 6.2 points as a junior last season, Obasohan is fifth in the SEC in scoring with an average of 17.7 points. He is also averaging 3.9 rebounds, 2.6 assists and 1.4 steals.

He has posted 20 points or more in 12 of Alabama’s past 19 games, including a career-high 35 during an upset of LSU in February and 32 during the Tide’s loss to Arkansas last week.

“I’m so proud of Retin,” Johnson said. “I got word (Monday) and was just really excited for him. I couldn’t wait to tell him. I wanted to be the first one to tell him.

“Obviously he couldn’t get All-Defensive and been on the first team without his teammates. His teammates do a lot to help him on the floor, but it’s well-deserved, well-earned.

... It’s pretty amazing stuff. I’m just honored to be his coach and work with him, just like the rest of our guys, day in and day out. He’s definitely had a tremendous leap this year.

“Retin is the third player in Tide history to be chosen SEC Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Levi Randolph was last season’s recipient.

Obasohan also is just the second player in program history to be first-team All-SEC and on the SEC All-Defensive Team in the same season. Trevor Releford is the other.

“It’s far beyond anything I could possibly imagine,” Obasohan said.

“It blows my mind still. It’s so surreal. It kind of seemed like a dream. I’m just grateful for the guys I have in that locker room, the coaching staff that I have and the God that I serve. It’s pretty unreal, and I’m excited to even add some more great stuff to this season.”

Here are three things to watch when Obasohan and No. 10 seed Alabama face No. 7 seed Ole Miss in the second round of the SEC Tournament on Thursday in Nashville, Tenn.:

Ole Miss senior guard Stefan Moody
Ole Miss’ 5-foot-10 guard leads the SEC and is tied for seventh nationally with an average of 23.1 points per game. Moody scored 43 points in leading the Rebels to a win over Mississippi State last week. “He’s a very explosive offensive player,” Obasohan said. “He’s a fast little rascal. He’s very shifty with the ball, gets great elevation on his jump shot, which makes it hard to contest.” Moody scored 21 points during Ole Miss’ win over Alabama in January, though he was just 3 of 9 from the field.

Alabama’s recent slide
After winning five straight games in early-to-mid February, the Tide lost four of its final five regular-season games. That means Alabama, which was still in good shape to make the NCAA Tournament as recently early last week, will now need to win the SEC Tournament in order to make the NCAA Tournament. “It’s just a situation where it’s like do or die,” Obasohan said. “When it comes to tournament play, just like the start of conference play, the stakes just go up, and anything can happen in tournament play. So that’s the mindset we have.”

Rebounding
Alabama was outrebounded, 48-26, during its loss at Georgia on Saturday. Ole Miss outrebounded the Tide, 37-30, in January.
Blazers hold on for record 26th victory

Take No. 1 seed into next week’s C-USA Tournament

It may not have been pretty on paper, but Saturday’s 73-70 win at Conference USA bottom feeder Florida Atlantic may have prepared UAB just fine for tournament play.

The Blazers, who won their school record 26th game to just five losses, had already wrapped up the No. 1 seed and Conference USA regular-season title last week.

But on Saturday, UAB saw a 13-point halftime lead dwindle to just one in the final 10 seconds.

William Lee blocked a Jeantal-Cylla shot with five seconds left, and the Blazers corralled the rebound to hold on for the win.

"Today was ugly," UAB head coach Jerod Haase said on postgame radio. "I told them with about two minutes left that we haven’t played great, I’m disappointed in that, but there couldn’t be a better situation right now for another experience to grow and learn from going into the conference tournament."

UAB (26-5, 16-2 Conference USA) led 41-28 at halftime, but hit just one of its last 10 shots to let Florida Atlantic (7-24, 5-13) close the gap.

"We missed some that we normally make," Haase said. "It was certainly a game that we could have blown open and created a bigger spread, but we didn’t. I thought we did a better job at FIU (on Thursday) of being engaged.

"All in that, we got the win and we put ourselves in good position come next Thursday, and now it’s time to play."

UAB’s Conference USA quarterfinal matchup will be Thursday at noon against the eighth or ninth seed.

The tournament will be at Legacy Arena in Birmingham.


Cylla led FAU with 15 points. Seven-foot center Ronald Delph scored 14 with 13 rebounds.
Faith rewarded for alumni, fans

Open practice on Saturday was the first chance since 2014 to see Blazers in action on the gridiron.

Drew Champlin  dckamplin@al.com

UAB fans and several former players on Saturday got their first look at real live Blazers football since 2014.

With a limited roster, head coach Bill Clark couldn’t put together a spring game. So he did the next best thing — opened up a practice for the public to watch. Immediately after, former Blazers took the field for the third annual Sons of UAB football game.

NFL players such as Roddy White, Joe Webb and Ty Long were back. So were Blazer from recent teams, such as linemen Billy Autrey, Hayden Naumann and Dom Sylvester; Blazer from the 90s, such as punter Chris Mayo.

While Clark ran his third practice of the spring, hundreds of fans shuffled in and out of UAB’s BBVA Compass Stadium to get the first look at the new Blazers.

“Our here watching these guys makes me want to suit up again one more time for UAB,” said Webb, who went to the Super Bowl with the Carolina Panthers. “Seeing them out here on the field is a big step.”

Webb had faith. He prayed every night for UAB football to return. So did Roddy White, the NFL all-pro who is looking for a new home after being released by the Atlanta Falcons last week.

“I’ve been in contact with the athletic director (Mark Ingram) and Coach Clark,” White said. “They were trying and pushing and moving and trying to get the program back and talking to people around the community. I knew we were heading in the right direction a long time ago.”

Long, a kicker who just signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, also had faith, as did Autrey, a starting offensive lineman for UAB from 2012 to 2013.

“Something inside you just tells you it’s not over for good,” Autrey said. “I feel like it’s going to be even better when it comes back. It’s almost a blessing in disguise. It sucked when it happened, but we’re going to be just fine.”

Autrey remained in Birmingham, and is working at Good People Brewing.

Chaves, a receiver for the Blazers from 2001 to 2004, was back on campus, he estimated, for the first time since he received his degree in 2010. After spending three years as a receivers coach at Texas A&M–Kingsville, he’s now a first-year head coach at St. John Paul II in Corpus Christi, Texas. He’s stayed connected to UAB through social media.

“I think it’s something that’s so good and something that has so much steam going ahead, it’s hard to keep down,” Chaves said.

Most of these players were at Legion Field this time last year. While UAB didn’t promote its alumni football game, former players and Free UAB supporters got the word out through a Facebook group.

Clark started the alumni flag football game in 2014, and those connected to football the program wanted to see it live.

“We didn’t have a lot of fans, but we had a lot of participation from the old guy,” Mayo said.

Maye admired faith among the many who had faith.

UAB football would return, and he wasn’t fully convinced until Clark signed his new five-year contract in September, nearly a year after the program was shuttered.

“Watching the players come across the field. I got a little emotional,” Mayo said. “I never thought it would be back. After standing out there on the second of December, I never imagined. Especially being back like this, it’s pretty awesome.

“Until you get (Clark) locked up, you don’t really have anything. He’s the reason that it’s back, and he’s the reason that we all fought. Seeing him and the vision we had for the program, that’s why we fought.”

Sylvester had to take a medical hardship after the 2013 season because of a knee injury. He remained around the program, and the New York native was depressed when it was originally taken away.

“In the back of my mind, I was still thinking that my college experience was kind of tainted right now,” Sylvester said. “All of my friends were transferring to different states. My best friend’s in Oklahoma. I wasn’t going to let the decision of a couple of individuals affect the rest of my life.”

But he had hope that the program would return, and couldn’t be more thankful for the Sons of UAB alumni game.

UAB will welcome around 30 new players this fall and will hold three scrimmages, the first on Aug. 25. But Saturday was another step on the journey back.

The Blazers’ Walk made way for players to walk from the football facility into BBVA Compass Stadium.

There were fans, cheerleaders and a band.

And most important, there was football.

“it’s so good to be out here seeing green and gold hitting each other,” Autrey said. “It just feels right.”
Harbaugh is Saban, without titles

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So Jim Harbaugh had an interesting week.
He took his team on a spring break/spring practice road trip to a high school football factory in south Florida, then ripped out the heart of Tennessee coach Butch Jones and showed it to him.

Or, to use a more apt metaphor, Harbaugh ate his lunch.

Memo to Jones and any other coach foolish enough to spar with Harbaugh on Twitter: You can’t out-troll the college football world’s biggest troll.

As a cherry on top, we learned the Michigan coach and his staff will be returning to the Heart of Dixie for another satellite camp in June, this one at Bob Jones High School in Madison. Hope Coach Khaki got some beach time this week to work on his tan.

In Harbaugh’s continuing crusade to have every coach and fan of every other school — especially in the SEC — hate him with the fire of a thousand suns, you’d have to say the first week of March of his second year on the job was a rousing success.

Harbaugh traveling through the South for the second straight offseason like Sherman making his way to the sea is just another indication that he’s blazing a trail not unlike one we witnessed around here almost a decade ago. The details are different, but the general aura that surrounds him is eerily familiar.

He’s Nick Saban without all those national championships.

Saban’s tireless schedule when he first arrived in Tuscaloosa was filled with unparalleled recruiting dedication and innovation.
Some of the Alabama coach’s ideas, such as frequent spring evaluation bums and videoconferences with recruits, sent other coaches reaching for their smelling salts and NCAA rulebooks to ask, “Can he do that?”

SEE SCARBINSKY, B9
SCARBINSKY
FROM B1

In the most famous example, the NCAA’s answer to Saban’s whirlwind spring recruiting tour was to put a stop to it.

Head coaches can no longer go on the road during the spring — unless they rent space at an out-of-state high school populated by a boatload of college prospects and take their team with them.

The Saban rule hasn’t exactly hindered Alabama’s ability to consistently bag No. 1 signing classes.

No doubt the inevitable Harbaugh rule won’t deter Michigan, either.

On the field, Harbaugh’s 10-3 first year at Michigan was more successful than Saban’s 7-6 initial run at Alabama, but there were some parallels. Michigan lost to rivals Ohio State and Michigan State but had an eventual playoff team in the Spartans beaten until the botched punt on the final play.

Alabama lost to rivals Auburn and LSU in 2007 but had a fourth-quarter lead on eventual national champion LSU until the Tigers scored two late touchdowns.

It was a sign the times were changing.

Another sign arrived recently in my email inbox after I wrote a column about the evil genius of Michigan’s week of spring practice at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

Some Michigan fans objected strongly in the same way some Alabama fans beg to differ vehemently if you dare suggest that Saban did not indeed hang the moon.

Hate mail wasn’t a new experience for me. Hate mail from Michigan fans was.

The best response was an unsigned and rather well-written screed barely shorter than War and Peace from a self-declared Michigan fan. It read like a declaration of war.

A sample:

“Harbaugh will, and don’t hesitate for a second to consider this anything but a complete truth, take advantage of every resource available to him that comes with being the head coach at Michigan, resources so great no other college program can come close to matching. And he will do so without hesitating to piss off the coaches, commissioners, basically anyone associated with the SEC for nothing more than the enjoyment that comes with their whining and bitching. … And he will not slow his attack until the SEC retreats and quits attempting to impede his progress.”

Alrighty then.

Another so-called Michigan fan called me “the most delusional Southerner since the guy who poisoned the trees at Auburn.”

First time I’ve been compared to Harvey Updyke. Not to mention, a lot of the locals consider me a dang Yankee because I came and stayed.

So it seems at least a vocal few Michigan fans will take great offense if you utter a discouraging word about their esteemed head coach, who has yet to win so much as a division title in the Big Ten but has clearly captured the hearts and minds of Wolverine supporters.

Sound familiar?